

## Case Study Results

This section presents the results of the case studies. The fourteen case studies conducted for this research produced an abundance of comments and subsequent insights into the character of the nature tourism businesses that participated in the online Web survey. For the six major topic areas and a brief question at the end of the interview, there were a total of 719 comments. Due to the open-ended nature of the interviews, 148 comments did not fit into these topic categories, and were not included in this analysis. Thus, 571 comments were evaluated. An overview of the analysis is presented in this section and the complete analysis is included in Appendix G. It presents an analysis of all of the comments and their frequencies in tabular and graphic form.

This section provides an overview of the telephone interviews by extracting information that was the pertinent to this research. These comments were summarized on the following topic areas: *defining the businesses, marketing, depicting a place, perspectives about the Web, Web based communities, and areas of assistance*. For each of these topics, tables of sample comments are provided.

### Summary of Responses to the Case Study Questions

As discussed in the methods section, the topics for the case study interviews were mainly derived from the quantitative survey. Other considerations include research conducted at Southwest Texas State University and Texas A&M University, and a national effort to assist nature tourism businesses as described previously.

This section summarizes the prominent points for each of the questions in the interviews. This information helped to clarify questions that arose from the quantitative survey. More discussion about the implications of these results will be included in the Results Summary and the Conclusions and Recommendations chapters.

***Topic 1: How nature tourism businesses define their business***

Of all of the topics discussed, this one was the most difficult for people to answer. The majority of the responses fell into explanatory comments that describe the kinds of activities that they provide at their business, or reasons why they might have selected one term over another.

The respondents emphasized two major points. The first point was that establishing a clear way to describe their businesses was important for marketing purposes. The second was that deciding on a single term is difficult because most businesses provide a diversity of activities.

Nine of the fourteen interviewees (64 percent) mentioned marketing as an issue when responding to this question. The respondents believed that selecting a term for one's business is critical for 1) the development of the products and services that they offer for their business, and 2) portraying the products and services to their customers.

The second most common comment was that it was difficult to identify a single term to capture the breadth of activities that are provided at their attractions. Seven (50 percent) of the respondents mentioned this issue. A few of the respondents thought that it is necessary to use more than a few words to try to describe their businesses. Table 5.12 provides a sampling of responses that fell into these two categories.

TABLE 5.8

Themes and sample quotations of interview responses to the topic of defining nature tourism businesses.

Themes	Samples of Interview Responses
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop clientele to do word of mouth etc.</li> <li>• It's a marketing strategy identified for them to sell to ecotourism customers</li> <li>• I market to a specific kyaking, canoeing, sailing audience.</li> <li>• Originally they were not these types of businesses but they are trying to take advantage of an additional market.</li> <li>• We market ourselves as a bed and breakfast but we are much more than that.</li> <li>• Word of mouth is the best marketing because people can describe it to their friends in a way that relates to the people.</li> </ul>
Difficult to choose a term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard to pick from a predetermined list.</li> <li>• I had difficulty picking a particular term.</li> <li>• The other terms do not describe.</li> <li>• It's difficult for customers to understand what the product is because of this confusion.</li> <li>• There is a challenge describing ourselves so customers understand what we offer.</li> <li>• We are trying to create an image in peoples mind to know what we are.</li> </ul>

***Topic 2: Marketing***

The conversations for this topic revealed three primary themes: 1) marketing is important, 2) the Internet is an integral part of these businesses' marketing strategies, and 3) marketing is expensive.

Twelve (86 percent) of the case study participants said marketing is "important," "very important," or "pivotal" to their success. The interviewees' confidence about how to accomplish this varied. One respondent believed that he had a successful marketing formula using a combination of aggressive Internet marketing, the use of guidebook reviews, and placing brochures and flowers at the regional airport. Two other respondents were much less confident and were struggling to determine the best ways to grow their businesses. The remaining respondents fell somewhere in the middle of this spectrum.

Eleven (78 percent) of the case study respondents mentioned that the Internet was a critical part of their marketing strategy. Almost all of the respondents made comments about linking to other Web sites as opposed to developing strategies that would help to get their Web sites listed with search engines. This is an important finding because it shows that there is an understanding of the need to collaborate with other businesses through the use of the Web and that they do not trust search engines.

A variety of comments were about the challenges associated with marketing. Seven (50 percent) of the interviewees mentioned the issue of the expense of marketing. Nonetheless, all the respondents agreed that without the Internet, marketing would be much more challenging.

All of the respondents (100 percent) provided several suggestions and comments about the need for marketing assistance. The areas of assistance mentioned were diverse.

The most common themes for assistances in marketing mentioned were 1) information about how to understand their target markets, 2) marketing “how-to’s,” 3) how to develop collaborative relationships with other business, such as marketing cooperatives. Table 5.13 provides a sample of responses of the actual comments for marketing.

### ***Topic 3: The role of “place”***

The most common comments about “place” and how it related to their nature tourism businesses were: 1) there’s something special about their place, 2) their place can provide unique or special experience to people, 3) pictures and text are the main ways to present the place on their Web sites, and 4) using pictures of people helps to create an image of the “place” for visitors to their Web sites. This topic stimulated considerable interest of the respondents because they felt strongly about their “places.”

All (100 percent) of the interviewees made some positive comments about their places. They believed that their current businesses were very dependent on where they were located. They would likely not be in business if they were located anywhere else. Several of the respondents provided very detailed descriptions of what there was to see at their attractions.

Once the geographic concept of “place” was described to them they were in total agreement that “place” is the essence of the products and experiences that they are providing. All (100 percent) of the respondents had comments about the special experiences that people can have when they visit their attractions. This shows that the respondents were aware that the “experience” with a place is significant to the meaning of the place.

TABLE 5.9

Themes and sample quotations of interview responses to the topic of marketing.

Themes	Samples of Interview Responses
Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing is a big issue and the money to do it with.</li> <li>• Without marketing you're nothing.</li> <li>• It's pivotal.</li> <li>• Marketing is our number one issue. It puts heads in the bed so to speak.</li> <li>• Marketing is very big. It is the biggest part of my budget.</li> <li>• Marketing is very important, the first step to make a sale to keep the business alive.</li> <li>• It's the most critical issue in establishing my business.</li> </ul>
Internet/ Linking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interested in finding as many combinations of links as possible.</li> <li>• If you don't work at linking you just as well not even put up a Web site to begin with.</li> <li>• Linking a Web site is pivotally important.</li> <li>• I use links to every possible resource, national local, conventional, not conventional.</li> <li>• You have to be willing to spend a lot of time working on your Web site to stay in business today because there is a lot of competition.</li> <li>• I belong to 3 COC, Charleston Edistow and Bueford that is my major reason to be a member to have a Web page link.</li> </ul>
Expensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Businesses think they have to be in the publication and the businesses they bring in do not cover cost of the ad.</li> <li>• Difficult decisions to make because they are expensive</li> <li>• The expensive part of the operation--advertising.</li> <li>• Yes it is a big issue because of the cost.</li> </ul>

All (100 percent) of the respondents mentioned that using a combination of text and pictures was important to depict place on their Web site. Text was the primary way to convey the information, while pictures were used to create a sense of the place. Only a couple of respondents thought using multimedia would be potentially useful. Table 5.14 provides a sample of comments about the topic of “place”.

#### ***Topic 4: Perspectives about the Web***

The responses to this topic were in agreement with the positive attitudes towards the Internet in the quantitative survey. The two most prevailing points revealed during these conversations were 1) the Internet was very important to the success of their businesses, and 2) they would not be able to do what they were doing without it.

All, (100 percent) of the respondents said that the Internet and their Web sites are a crucial element for the success of their businesses. Several of the respondents described phenomenal effects of the Web. One respondent who had been in business fifteen years mentioned that in a little over a year on the Internet his business increased by 50 percent.

The primary functions of the respondents’ Web sites are marketing and providing information. Eleven (79 percent) of the interviewees said they were not sure what they would do if they did not have Web sites to market their businesses.

The respondents’ enthusiasm for the Internet and the role it plays in their businesses explains their earnestness and willingness to participate in this research. They also were very interested in these research findings and if there would be any new information that might help them to improve their businesses. Table 5.15 lists some of the sample responses to the question about perspectives about the Web.

TABLE 5.10

Themes and sample quotations of interview responses to the topic of “place.”

Themes	Samples of Interview Responses
Something special	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lot of our customers want to come to the Taos area--it's a special place.</li> <li>• The Chesapeake Bay is our business.</li> <li>• Geology is very diverse. People come from all over the world because of the geology.</li> <li>• I couldn't be doing this business any place else. Surrounded by state forest.</li> <li>• We're associated with a very well known river. It essentially sells the trips.</li> <li>• Hill country is where they're located but mostly the river.</li> <li>• Hobby-Eberly telescope is a new type.</li> <li>• I give my tour in one of the largest undeveloped marine estuaries in North America. Ace Basin.</li> <li>• We have active lava flows only 25 miles away.</li> <li>• Yes it is very important to us because we are located in a totally unique place in Texas.</li> </ul>
Unique experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dual purpose wanting to share who and what we are and a way to attract the people they prefer. Want people to know that we are not Disney World or the Holiday Inn.</li> <li>• Most people are interested in a mix of activities when they visit places.</li> <li>• Nature of much of rafting business is people looking for the action of the rafting experience.</li> <li>• People are lethargic and bored because of the super hyped up stuff that they get on television. We need the calming effects provided by good experiences.</li> <li>• Providing services when people arrive.</li> <li>• This work is fun to introduce people to the natural, cultural, historical world around them.</li> <li>• What tourism, enriching and enjoying life is all about.</li> </ul>
Images and text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combination, great images, well written text, clarity, not complex, no techno.</li> <li>• People are looking for outdoor activities. Need to illustrate that.</li> <li>• Pictures and text.</li> </ul>

Table 5.10—*Continued*

Themes	Samples of Interview Responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pictures are the most important way. Text for information. People want to get information about where they are at.</li><li>• Pictures speak for themselves.</li><li>• I prefer using pictures of people.</li><li>• Put pictures of trips and participants.</li><li>• We are trying to get people good facts without fluff.</li></ul>

TABLE 5.11

Themes and sample quotations of responses to the topic of perspectives about the Web.

Themes	Samples of Interview Responses
Important to their business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 85 percent of my advertising.</li> <li>• Absolutely a good thing.</li> <li>• Bang for the buck is the beauty of the Web.</li> <li>• I have seen sales soar because of the Internet.</li> <li>• My Web site is very important.</li> <li>• It is a cost effective way to advertise.</li> <li>• It's a tremendous help.</li> <li>• Its been a great thing and continues to be.</li> <li>• Like getting an ad in the yellow pages in everyone phone book of the union.</li> </ul>
Web is a focus of the business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Couldn't deal without it.</li> <li>• Same message across to more people for the same money and have a response from it then that's where I'm headed.</li> <li>• The Internet has made a very weary effort to get clients much easier.</li> <li>• The Internet is a wonderful tool.</li> <li>• Without the Web I am not sure how I would advertise my business.</li> <li>• Focusing on the Web, it is very important to our marketing efforts.</li> </ul>

***Topic 5: Involvement with Web-based communities***

The two most prominent themes for this question were: 1) being involved with a Web based community is important to their business; and 2) the Internet is important for keeping in touch with that community.

Eleven (78 percent) of the case study participants said that being associated with others on the Web helps them to succeed in their business. However, it was apparent that individuals felt differently about how important it was. This difference appears to relate to their maturity in using the Web or the success of their businesses. Those seemed to be very versed in the Web environment and were more successful with their business ranked the importance of the Web-based community extremely high. In fact, two individuals that were confident with their success made the point emphatically that “linking” and collaboration with other businesses and organizations was critical for the success of their nature tourism businesses.

Eight (57 percent) of the interviewees mentioned that the Internet was important for keeping in touch with their communities/associations. As with the previous theme there was variation about how they viewed this issue. The recurring points were that the Internet was an excellent communication medium, and that they were aware of its importance and interested in continuing to use it. Table 5.16 lists the main themes and samples of responses for this topic.

TABLE 5.12

Themes and sample quotations of interview responses for the topic of Web-based community.

Themes	Samples of Interview Responses
Community/ associations are important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associations and Links page somewhere on menu bar is a live or die situation.</li> <li>• Communities/Associations are very important because these links are ways to get people to come to my site.</li> <li>• It is a very important to be a part of an area organization.</li> <li>• It is important to work with other businesses.</li> <li>• Nothing more important.</li> <li>• Priceless to their growth.</li> </ul>
As a communications tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The organizational Web site does advertising and then they are linked so We get some business that way.</li> <li>• The Internet is an integral part of our association.</li> <li>• The association has a web site with links to the various attractions.</li> <li>• I use a list serve to communicate with other members.</li> <li>• I use a mail list.</li> <li>• The Internet is an integral part of our association.</li> </ul>

### ***Topic 6. Areas of needed assistance***

The final topic for the case study interviews was to discuss the kinds of Web assistance these nature tourism business owners/managers needed. Two major areas of assistance emerged from these conversations: 1) how to get search engines to locate their Web sites for marketing, and 2) general Web site design.

Nine (64 percent) of the case study participants wanted to improve the marketing capabilities of their Web sites. Issues that were mentioned include meta tag coding, search engine strategies, linking to other Web sites, etc. The actual technical support needed varied broadly, but mostly people were interested in how to get their Web sites to reach as many potential customers as possible through search engines.

The second prominent area for assistance was general Web site design and development. Eight (57 percent) of the interviewees mentioned the need for some assistance in this area. An important finding from the interviews is that 50 percent of the respondents felt that a “fancy” or complicated Web site is not necessary. In addition, 50 percent of the respondents suggested that people with nature tourism operations should manage their own Web sites, or at least be very closely involved. Table 5.17 provides a sample of the comments for this topic.

For the complete analysis of the case study interviews including frequency tables and charts refer to Appendix G.

TABLE 5.13

Themes and sample quotations of interview responses to the topic of areas of assistance needed.

Category	Samples of Interview Responses
Marketing or search engines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is very important to have a prominent Links page. I can't emphasize this enough.</li> <li>• With some businesses the Links page becomes less important. This may spoil people getting their business started.</li> <li>• Appropriate meta tags for search engines.</li> <li>• Down and dirty of Web promotion--in simple terms.</li> <li>• Help getting found.</li> <li>• Search engines and how to keep it current.</li> <li>• Some type of miraculously simple tags, meta tags properly and extensively.</li> <li>• Teach them to use Google. One of the greatest phenomena of the modern Internet.</li> </ul>
Web design or development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would like to make my site more compact.</li> <li>• Help with Web design.</li> <li>• I need to hire someone who has been in Web design for a while to develop a new one from stem to stern.</li> <li>• To have it do what he wants it to do and not what the current Webmaster wants.</li> <li>• I want to redesign my site.</li> <li>• A fast Web site.</li> <li>• I am happy with our Web site because I can make changes myself.</li> </ul>