



Low-Cost Method for Conducting an Evaluation of Pricing and Online Presence of Tour Operators

This information is intended for Sea Grant staff and others who wish to evaluate the online presence of outdoor recreational tours and other guided-experience businesses. It describes a low-cost method for documenting the products and prices offered by such businesses and for measuring their success. The method was developed to evaluate coastal tour operations in Oregon, but it can also be applied to other locations and types of tours. The results of such data collection, especially if conducted annually, will help fill a gap in long-term trend information about tour operator prices, industry growth or contraction, and types of services.

In 2017 and 2018, Oregon Sea Grant used this approach to evaluate the online presence and pricing of Oregon coast tour operators. To view the results for 2017, go to <http://bit.ly/2UtYNSs>; for 2018, visit <http://bit.ly/2EARzp7>.

Readers of this publication will learn how to:

- Identify businesses that offer guided tours in their area
- Document the products and prices offered by these businesses
- Measure the efficacy of these businesses' marketing by their presence in Google search results
- Collect data on prices, products, and amenities via such searches
- Use the data collected to compare and contrast operations

As this is an Internet-based method, research can be conducted virtually anywhere and the results shared collaboratively. The author invites interested parties to contact him at miles.phillips@oregonstate.edu, or visit tourism.oregonstate.edu.

Research Instructions

This is an applied research project designed to collect real data on the status and operations of outdoor recreation businesses. The project scope is limited to finding the top 12 business listings in a Google search, which is one indication of the effectiveness of a business's online presence. You will collect data on prices, products, and amenities via such searches and use them to compare and contrast operations. You may choose to engage in follow-up comparisons, analyses, and surveys to expand the scope or attempt a more complete inventory of operations and perhaps a business needs assessment.

Data Collection

It is important to have very detailed instructions for data collection so that the work may be done consistently, especially by people new to the project such as undergraduate or graduate students. A very general description is provided below; for more detail, please contact the author.

Choose the specific towns and the types of tours or guided experiences you wish to target for your study. For our previous studies, we chose 15 coastal towns and

three different guided tour products (whale watching, kayaking, and salmon fishing). The products you select will serve as the search terms for your study.

Use an online data collection form in which to enter the results of your searches. We used Qualtrics for our studies (see “Sample Data Collection Form” on page 3).

Search a specific guided experience, one at a time, for each of the towns you’ve chosen to target. Conduct a Google search in an incognito browser, without setting a location or logging into an account, using the search terms you’ve identified for your study (see sample at right).

Record information in the online data collection form for relevant results. Relevant results are those found in the top 12 of a Google search for businesses that offer the targeted experience. If additional businesses are relevant after the top 12 results, record those businesses until you encounter three irrelevant, non-consecutive results.

Record every business that offers the targeted experience, even if the address is not within the selected towns or if prices are not available, but note that you will use only businesses within the selected towns and with prices available online in the price analyses. This will help you identify and differentiate tour business headquarters versus sites where the actual tours happen.

Data Analysis and Visualization

To analyze the data collected via online research, export the data from the collection form into an Excel file.

Calculations:

- Sort data on the specific tour products searched for into different sheets in Excel.
- Determine the total number of businesses that can be used in the price analyses (located within your selected towns and with prices available online). Separate them from the others.
- Calculate the total number of businesses per experience in each town. All encountered businesses, even those without online prices, are included in this count unless they are located outside of the selected towns.
- Calculate the minimum, average, and maximum prices of each guided experience in each town.
- Calculate the hourly minimum, average, and maximum prices of each guided experience across all towns (divide the total price by the length, in hours, of the experience).
- Organize an Excel chart for the geographic results table (see sample on page 4). Create a separate chart

for each of your guided tour products and another one for businesses outside the targeted towns.

Create the necessary graphs, charts, and tables representing this data. This will include the geographic results table, the number of businesses per experience per town, and the average prices per experience per town. In addition, include figures to indicate the maximum, average, and minimum tour prices. Also include a presentation of the hourly rate for each product.

Sample Google Search Result

(Search terms: “whale watching tour near Newport, Oregon”)

Rating - Hours -

| Business Name | Rating | Reviews | Category | Distance | Address |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|----------------------------|----------|---------------|
| Marine Discovery Tours | 4.5 | 69 | Whale watching tour agency | 31.7 mi | Newport, OR |
| Yaquina Bay Charters LLC | 4.7 | 71 | Whale watching tour agency | 31.1 mi | Newport, OR |
| Whale's Tail Charters, LLC | 4.8 | 46 | Whale watching tour agency | 33.1 mi | Depoe Bay, OR |

More places

Top 10 Best Whale Watching Tours in Newport, OR - Last Updated ...

https://www.yelp.com/search?find_desc=whale+watching+tours...Newport%2C+OR

Reviews on Whale Watching Tours in Newport, OR - Marine Discovery Tours, Whale's Tail Charters, Newport Tradewinds, Whale Research Eco Excursions, ...

Oregon Whale Watching Tours | Whale's Tail Charters | Depoe Bay

<https://www.whalestaildepoebay.com/>

Whale's Tail Charters is dedicated to making your Oregon Whale Watching Tour an experience of a lifetime. Oregon Whale Watching Tours | Call 541.921.1323.

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Marine Discovery Tours

<https://www.marinediscoverytours.com/>

We offer Whale Watching and Sea Life Cruises daily from March through October. ... cruise that focuses on Oregon wildlife aboard the deluxe 65ft DISCOVERY.

[Sea Life Cruise](#) · [Group Tours](#) · [School Tours](#) · [Gallery](#)

Whale Watching - Best Whale Watching Depoe Bay Oregon ...

<https://www.tradewindscharters.com/whale-watching/>

Whale watching during summer and fall off Depoe Bay is also spectacular. Some of the Gray Whales do not migrate all the way north to

Sample Data Collection Form

Name of town where search is conducted (your location as researcher)

Product search term used (copy and paste from Google search line)

Name of town searched

- Astoria
- Tillamook
- Seaside
- Cannon Beach
- Lincoln City
- Depoe Bay
- Newport
- Florence
- Reedsport
- Winchester Bay
- Coos Bay
- Bandon
- Port Orford
- Gold Beach
- Brookings

Describe search results (how many relevant results were found?); stop search after three listings in a row are irrelevant

Please take a screen shot of the first page of results and upload image here (you may need to save image to your computer first)

Drop files or click here to upload

Resulting ranking of this business

- Free results: please list rank 1–12
- Paid results (ad): please list rank 1–3

Business website

Business name (if the search yields more than one result for this company, please indicate by adding “duplicate” to end of name)

Copy of product description, as provided by website

Lowest price per adult for specific product searched

Please copy full description of product/pricing options here (e.g., adult, child, 1/2 day, full day, species, hourly rates, etc.)

Amenities included in package

- Drinks
- Food
- Use of scope or binoculars
- Other 1

- Other 2

Does company website mention marine reserve or other public land resource as a benefit or part of the experience?

- Yes
- No

Street address of the business (if only a P.O. box is listed, enter that)

Additional notes about the business, including description of product or company (may be text copied from website)

Your name; and comments on the process, reasons for choices you had to make, etc. (to help improve the data collection process)

Sample Geographic Results Table

The towns listed on the left side of this table are where the tour businesses' registered addresses are; the towns listed across the top are where the actual tours happen. The letter/number combination indicates where in the Google search result the company's website appeared: "F" denotes Google's featured snippets box; "R" denotes a regular search result. The number associated with the letter signifies where the website ranked.

| Office Location | Salmon Charters | Astoria | Bandon | Brookings | Cannon Beach | Coos Bay | Depoe Bay | Florence | Gold Beach | Lincoln City | Newport | Port Orford | Reedsport | Seaside | Tillamook | Winchester Bay |
|-----------------|---|---------|--------|-----------|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|------------|--------------|---------|-------------|-----------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| Astoria | Astoria Fishing Charters and Guide Service | 1F, 2R | | | 1, 4R | | | | | | | | | 1F, 6R | | |
| Astoria | First Pass Outfitters | 8R | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Astoria | Lance Fisher Fishing | 3F, 1R | | | | | | | | | | | 1R | 12R | 2R | 1R |
| Astoria | Total Fisherman | 7R | | | 6R | | | | | | | | | 4R | | |
| Astoria | Gale Force Guides LLC | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3F | | |
| Bandon | Fish Oregon Guide Service | | 1R | 8R | | | | | 1R | | | | | | | |
| Bandon | Prowler Charters | | 9R | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brookings | Brookings Fishing Charters | | | 3F | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brookings | Brookings River and Ocean Fishing | | | 2F, 4R | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brookings | Oregon Fishing Adventure | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brookings | Salmon King Lodge Guide Service | | | 9R | | 8R | | | | | | | 5R | | | 4R |
| Brookings | Wild Rivers Fishing | | 6R | 1F, 1R | | 3R | | | | | | 8R | | | 11R | |
| Coos Bay | Sharky's Charters | | | | | 2F, 5R | | | | | | | | | | |
| Coos Bay | Betty Kay Charters | | | | | 1F | | | | | | | | | | |
| Depoe Bay | Dockside Charters | | | | | | 1F, 2R | | | 9R | | | | | | |
| Depoe Bay | Tradewinds Charters | | | | | | 2F, 3R | | | 3F | | | | | | |
| Gold Beach | Five Star Charters | | | | | | | | 1F, 6R | | | 9R | | | | |
| Gold Beach | Helen's Guide Service | | | | | | | | 2R | | | | | | | |
| Gold Beach | J Taylor Guide Services | | | | | | | | 8R | | | | | | | |
| Gold Beach | Rogue River Guide Service | | | | | | | | 2F, 4R | | | 7R | | | | |
| Gold Beach | Rogue River Guided Fishing with Tyson Crumley | | | | | | | | 3F, 7R | | | | | | | |
| Gold Beach | Sportfishing Oregon | | | | | | | | 12R | | | | | | | |
| Lincoln City | Coyote Rock RV Resort and Marina | | | | | | | | | 7R | | | | | | |
| Lincoln City | Riverhawk Guide Service | | | | | | | | | 4R | | | | | | |
| Newport | Captain's Reel Deep Sea Fishing | | | | | | | | | | 3F, 9R | | | | | |
| Newport | Newport Tradewinds Deep Sea Fishing | | | | | | | | | | 2F | | | | | |
| Newport | Yaquina Bay Charters | | | | | | | | | | 1F, 5R | | | | | |
| Tillamook | Firefighters Guide Service | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 8R | |
| Tillamook | Garibaldi Charters | | | | 3F | | | | | | | | | | 2F | |
| Winchester Bay | Winchester Bay Charters | | | | | | | | | | | | 2F | | | 2F, 11R |

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