



Switched on: Tourism Wollongong general manager Greg Binskin, Wollongong School of Management and Marketing PhD candidate Katie Lazarevski, Professor Sara Dolnicar, Professor Daniel Fesenmaier, Greg Kerr and Dr Lois Burgess in Wollongong yesterday to discuss the role of search engines in tourism.

Be web savvy and tap into tourism

By GREG ELLIS

TRAVEL destinations such as Wollongong have a tremendous opportunity to influence people's behaviour by making an impact with just 10 words.

An international expert on the use of search engines in tourism told operators that 50 per cent of most trips start with an online search, so it is important to learn how to manage search engines such as Google.

Temple University's National Laboratory for Tourism and eCommerce director Professor Daniel Fesenmaier, of Philadelphia, said most search engines produce millions of search results but most users only look at the first two to three pages.

He said that meant if a site did not make it into the top 20 or 30 recommendations after a web

search it was unlikely to be seen.

Prof Fesenmaier spoke at the University of Wollongong's Marketing Research Innovation Centre (MRIC) which teaches tourism marketing and undertakes tourism research.

Lecturer Greg Kerr said the visit was the result of MRIC directors Professor Sara Dolnicar and Dr Lois Burgess establishing international linkages and industry partnerships.

Prof Fesenmaier said marketing on the internet was mostly about persuasion and it was possible to develop systems that made sites more likely to be seen.

And once they see the results it is important to know what their first impulse is and how they are likely to select a site.

Research shows most people's search words come from their image of a destination.

And knowing the words they are likely to use is crucial to being near the top of the search results.

"Most people only see 10 to 30 websites but for marketing purposes if you are not in the top 10 it is not worthwhile," Prof Fesenmaier said.

"If you are not in the key group of words that people have in mind, you are not in the marketplace. You have to have words that people have in their image of the city and know what 10 or 11 words they are most likely to use."

Prof Fesenmaier said Tourism Australia did it well. It is No 2 on the Google list when you type in Australia and its site makes a good first impression.

It is also important to have 10 active words that differentiate one place from another and strong words for positioning such as official, vacation and attraction.