

Getting Social: Why All Travel Professionals Need to Use Social Media

TIG Global complementary webinar on Getting Social – Thursday, December 3, 2009 – 2:00PM (EST).

Register now at <http://www.tigglobal.com/webinar>

Chevy Chase, MD –November 17, 2009 –The Internet has changed. What was once an efficient one-way communication device has evolved into an interactive, two-way communication tool. Consumers are now driving the content of the web. Gone are the days when hand-written comment cards would reside at the bottom of a dusty box in the lobby. Today's digitally driven consumers now broadcast their experiences directly online via social media. The information that they post is instant and public. The reality is that consumers, some with the even the slightest technological know-how, are using social media to speak up, regardless of whether or not you are participating in the conversation. With over 44%¹ of all Internet users active in social media, the phenomenon has matured to the point that it can no longer be passed off as a fad. The time to get involved is now.

As a cardinal rule, it is important to remember that involvement in (and success with) social media takes time and commitment. Your efforts will not come to fruition overnight. Social media must become a habit and extension of all other marketing activities. The objective is to be able to prove to past and potential visitors that you are listening and you care, which goes a long way in building consumer trust.

Read on to uncover the various benefits of social media, demonstrating its critical place in your overall Internet marketing strategy.

Social Media Benefits

Benefit 1: New Marketing Channel

Social Media allows you to push content quickly and cheaply to a primed audience.

On the most basic level, social media provides another avenue to push your content out at a low cost. Thus, social media can affordably and quickly help increase your brand's overall web presence and attract more eyes to view your brand. In this capacity, the benefit of social media is undeniable.

While your social media audience may be smaller than the audience of a regular Internet marketing campaign, it will be much more focused and attentive as the consumers have self-selected to see your messages. This provides you with an opportunity to branch out and reach new, niche consumer markets. Most importantly, social media users will likely be appreciative of your updates, and are more inclined to pass them along to their networks of friends and family.

One of the keys to social media is realizing that there are different channels to explore based on your desired goals. You can distribute new photos or a new video through social photography and video distribution sites, such as Flickr and YouTube, while Facebook, Twitter and company blogs act as the perfect places to display up to the minute content, such as renovation updates, special promotions, and additional property news.

¹ (2009, August 18). *Focusing on Social Networks*. Retrieved from <http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1007232>

Additionally, social media provides a unique opportunity to enhance your PR outreach. Consider sharing little known facts about your property or destination as well as news that isn't necessarily big enough to necessitate its own press release, such as small service touches or ongoing community involvement, to give your brand a distinct personality. Social media sites can often serve as an independent PR department, as they offer the ideal platform for letting your customers exchange meaningful conversations about your property or destination, essentially selling the attributes of your brand *for you*.

Benefit 2: Two-Way Communication

Foster two-way conversations with social media to create ongoing relationships with your customers.

Imagine entering a crowded networking event and witnessing a room full of people discussing your brand all around you, but not stepping in and saying a word. This scenario is the equivalent of deciding not to invest time in social media outlets. The conversations are happening whether you choose to participate or not. In addition, most hotels and destinations have the tendency to only be *reactive* in the social media space; attempting to remove negative TripAdvisor reviews or censoring content on Facebook. However, there is a separate audience present on these sites that *hasn't* had a negative experience; those of which can be converted into brand-loyal consumers by having a *proactive* social media strategy.

Social media platforms are designed to get the conversation started with your customers, so give your brand or destination a personality. Get interested travelers involved by sharing news that extends beyond the doors of your business and highlight local events that could be useful in promoting your consumers' interests. One method for creating more buzz about your property, while also listening to what your consumers have to say, is to encourage past visitors to share their experiences on your social media page. Negative comments are still a possibility, but approach them head on. Responding to consumers' concerns is a great way to show them, and everyone else, that you care.

Benefit 3: "Viralability"

Use social media to encourage your brand advocates to spread your message across their network.

The majority of consumers spend countless hours online, stumbling across all types of content and using social media tools to share the things they have enjoyed with a variety of personal networks. This behavior provides an advantage for brands to spread enticing content that encourages these consumers to share across their networks. The more your content is shared from group to group, the easier it becomes to build strong inbound links that drive consumers directly to your brand's sites.

At its core, social media is about sharing information and experiences with acquaintances in your networks. When fans and followers on your Facebook page or Twitter profile respond to interesting content, that content is also displayed on that individual's social network through live news feeds. With 90% of online consumers trusting recommendations from their friends, your message, being shared friend-to-friend, just got way more credible (Nielsen 2009),

To facilitate viral sharing, be sure to tell consumers that you are participating with specific social media sites. Place clearly visible buttons and links to your social media pages on your property or destination website, and consistently

embed the links in e-blasts and e-mail signatures. Make it even easier for consumers to share your message by utilizing social media widgets like a free “AddThis” button that allows instant content sharing. By enabling followers to share their thoughts at the simple click of a button, you are growing your visibility online exponentially.

These simple additions will generate interest and increase the quality of your following within the social media sites in which you decide to participate. Once a credible following is built, it will provide the perfect platform for promoting the unique attributes of your business.

Benefit 4: Improve Search Engine Optimization

Use social media to create a larger online presence and generate links for higher natural search rankings.

Another important benefit of social media activities is the positive affect they can have on a site’s search engine optimization (SEO) efforts. A strong social media strategy over time can help a hotel or destination occupy more listings on a search result page for certain keyword phrases, pushing competitors and other third parties further down the list. For example, if a hotel is able to occupy more space on the first page of a search engine results page, due to the presence of multiple media outlets (website, blog, Flickr profile, Facebook page, Twitter profile, etc.), then that equates to less space occupied by competing sites, such as Expedia and TripAdvisor; all of which are vying to book a more expensive reservation. By implementing a strong social media program, you are able to inch out the competition and stake a greater claim on this highly coveted search engine real estate to drive direct bookings.

Social media also has an indirect value for link building and improving link popularity, which is the most important factor for SEO. Facebook and Twitter represent two of the top three methods that online consumers use to share information. When you have audiences that are engaged in multiple social media communities, the individuals invested in those communities are very likely interconnected and enthusiastic about sharing information across these various outlets. For example, a customer who has become a fan of a hotel on Facebook might learn of a special discount through that hotel’s Facebook updates, and in turn, Tweet about it and send your link to their friends on a personal Twitter page. This sharing instantly increases your ability to attract links for your brand.

Benefit 5: Improve Results

Combine new and current metrics to see how social media can affect you bottom line.

As with any investment in marketing, there is a need to produce tangible results. Typically, success in social media is measured by visibility and interaction. In addition to these unique social media metrics, more traditional tracking tools can also be utilized, such as Google Analytics or Omniture Site Catalyst, when quantifying the results of your social media efforts

RIU Hotels and Resorts recently completed a three month “Ultimate Fan” competition in which they challenged customers to send in their best photos and videos of the resorts. RIU Hotels and Resorts made sure to track the results of the campaign, and as a result of the competition, their Facebook fan base grew from 448 fans to 1,356. Additionally, not only did the number of fans grow, but since the contest was based on content contributions, RIU also saw over 350 photos and 8 videos uploaded.

So, you may be thinking; fan interaction is great, but it does not directly put heads in beds or drive visitors to my destination. What does all of this mean in terms of the bottom line? Since the beginning of 2009, Facebook has been the 7th most popular referring site to RIU Hotels and Resorts. It has also generated nearly \$10,000 in revenue, all with an extremely limited time and cost investment.

A healthy skepticism can be a good thing when it comes to social media, as it is a new idea for most hotels and destinations. But for the general public, your target audience, social media has become a part of everyday Internet life. The benefits of social media are real, abundant and measureable. Simply getting involved on a few of these social media sites or dabbling with social media tools is a good start, but it will not provide efficient or effective returns in the long run. It is essential to create a comprehensive strategy that intertwines social media messaging with traditional marketing efforts to deliver definitive positive and measureable results.

Complimentary Webinar on "Getting Social"

Interested in learning more? Please join us on Thursday, December 3, 2009 at 2:00pm (EST) for an educational webinar, ***Getting Social: Why All Travel Professionals Need to Use Social Media***, as TIG Global resident experts Will Samolis, Brian Bagel, and Brian Fitzgerald discuss strategies for effective Social Media campaigns. [Click here](#) to register today.

About TIG Global

[TIG Global](#), headquartered in the Washington, DC metro area, is dedicated to assisting the travel industry with exceeding their online marketing goals and specializes in [hotel Internet marketing](#) and [destination Internet marketing](#). Serving an extensive portfolio of clients worldwide, TIG Global combines its industry knowledge and e-business expertise to help clients maximize the online channel. TIG Global offers multi-language websites, a vast network of internationally based strategic linking partners, email and pay-per-click marketing campaigns tailored to all international markets, custom social media solutions, and websites optimized for major search engines around the world.

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