

Social Media for Hotels

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Since everyone and his sister is jumping on the social media bandwagon of late, I thought it would be a great idea to provide hotels with some insight as to what each social media site is best utilised for and how you can leverage each site to increase your occupancy and RevPAR. Over the next few months, I'll be doing a series of posts on the various sites to give you the information you need to know to be successful in the ever-expanding social media marketplace.

First, an overview of the growth of the social media phenomenon:

- A recent report from The Nielsen Company showed that there has been a worldwide increase of 82% in time spent on social networking sites, from 3 hours per month to 5.5 hours.
- In the UK alone, Facebook has a reported 24 million active users making it the most used social media site.
- In the UK, visits to social media sites account for 10.61% of the share of UK internet visits, falling second place only to online searches (with 12.16%).
- In the UK, YouTube is the second most accessed social media site, whereas Twitter usage only makes up around 2% of the social media usage.[1]

As it is the most popular, let's start with Facebook – www.facebook.com. As I mentioned, Facebook is the most used social media site in the UK; as of February 2010, there were 23,905,740 people in the UK using Facebook. Just over 51% of those users are female, and more than 50% of the total number is between the ages of 18-35 – although the numbers of people in older demographics are rising every day.[2]

Facebook allows users to create and maintain friendships, document their lives and connect with brands that they care about. Hotels and hospitality companies should be using Facebook to create a community and develop a two-way conversation with their customers. The community should provide consumers with content and conversations that are relevant to their lives, to their mindsets and not just sales info. Remember social media in general, is more about creating relationships, developing consumer loyalty and brand awareness, rather than making direct sales. That doesn't mean social media can't generate sales over the long-term, however. It definitely can, but it takes time and commitment to the project, and over time increased brand awareness and improved customer perception of your product or service, will lead to an increase in sales.

So what makes Facebook stand out from the social media pack (aside from the huge number of active users)? Facebook has a multitude of tools that can be leveraged by companies: status updates, company pages, event pages, groups and more. Let's examine each a little closer:

- Status updates are short messages (max. 420 characters) that are communicated with your friends and followers and they provide you with an opportunity to communicate directly with them and (hopefully) start a conversation with them.



- Company pages are basically a business profile, rather than a personal profile. They have most of the same usability as a personal profile would – you can communicate with your followers; post status updates, photos, videos; create events; share links; and invite other people to become ‘fans’ of your company, rather than ‘friends’ as with your personal profile. Of course, having a complete, detailed, up-to-date company page is very important because many people will check out your Facebook page rather than your website to find out what is going on with your company.
- Event pages are a great way to spread the word about upcoming events or promotions that your company is holding. Your event page allows you to include all of the pertinent details of the event, invite your fans and create a guest list for those who are attending. Consider offering a customer appreciation event for your fans and followers where anyone who RSVPs ‘Attending’ on your event page, receives a free appetizer at your restaurant or a discount off of their room. It’s a great way to get people to sign up to follow you, therefore building up your Facebook marketing list for future communications.
- There are Facebook groups for almost every single cause, company, activity, etc. Consider creating a group for previous customers who have stayed at your hotel or eaten at your restaurant. It makes it easy to communicate directly with those people that you are trying to cultivate to become repeat customers.

Hopefully this post has given you a better idea of how to leverage social media’s most popular site to generate awareness and business for your company. Of course, if you have any questions or would like more info about anything that you read in my posts, don’t hesitate to contact me at any time – jlr@travelinkd.com

And check back in two weeks for ideas and info about incorporating YouTube in your social media outreach. Happy Facebooking!

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