

Hotels 2011 Social Media Guide



How is Social Media Shaping the Hotel Industry?

Social Media allows hotels to establish a relationship with customers unlike any other media. It opens the door for hotels to establish a one-on-one relationship with travelers where hotels are getting regular feedback on how their customers are reacting to their marketing messages, customer service, and hotel stay experience.

Social media is also impacting the way consumers perceive hotels. Many consumers read reviews online before they book their hotel stays. Hotels can benefit from online reviews by addressing the needs and concerns of their customers. By responding to a negative review, the customer feels like his or her needs are addressed and taken into consideration. Potential customers view the hotel as genuinely caring and constantly improving their offerings. This turns a negative situation into a positive.

Social media is a great way to build brand awareness. Hotels can interact with customers more personally on Facebook Fan Pages or through Twitter. They can provide news about their hotels, talk about promotions or deals, and ask questions directly to their fans. While people are demanding lower prices and better deals from their favorite travel destinations, they also want better service. From pre-stay questions to post-stay follow up, communicating via Twitter or other social media platforms is an effective way to provide a positive customer service experience.

Hotels are also using social media, specifically multimedia sites like YouTube, to set themselves apart in an innovative way. Through these unique competitive advantages, hotels are gaining new customers and creating loyal ones.

From positioning to promotions to lead generation, social

media is another great marketing tool when used correctly. This guide details how some hotels are using social media to their advantage and how you can, too.

Most Common Uses of Social Media for Hotels

Information Experts: Hotels want to be the go-to resource for all things travel related. They spotlight interesting things going on in the cities where their hotels are located, and they connect social media to employees who are in-the-know about what guests can and should do while they're in town.

Discounts: Hotels offer discounts through social media on anything from stays to special packages to hotel amenities.

Contests, Sweepstakes, and Giveaways: Hotels are embracing contests sweepstakes, and giveaways by providing dream vacations or free stays to those talking about their experiences or at random.

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Gaining/maintaining business: Hotels monitor the social media space to deal with complaints, grab business for special events, or to thank happy guests for their visit.

Social travel sites: Hotels visit sites like TripAdvisor to keep track of customer reviews and to respond to negative feedback. Hotels aim to be at the top in the rankings for each city in which they have a hotel.

Lead generation: Hotels use sites like LinkedIn to connect to business

Key Benefits of Social Media & Hotels

As the industry continues to progress more and more, hotels have seen the impact social media can have on their business. The following is a list of possible benefits that can result by the use of an effective social media strategy:

- ★ Provides a cost-effective way to boost site traffic
- ★ Has a viral effect – passionate reviewers will spread the word through their social media accounts
- ★ Engages travelers in a new way.
- ★ Protects the brand's reputation through consistent monitoring and replies
- ★ Creates loyal customers
- ★ Generates brand buzz
- ★ Boosts brand awareness

Hotels Using Social Media

Social media is impacting the way customers approach the hotel industry. 4hoteliers.com reports that over two-thirds of hotel booking in the U.S. will be influenced by the Internet this year. According to a Marketingsherpa.com survey, 62 percent of respondents said they would check

reviews over asking a friend or consulting a newspaper for a recommendation.

By evaluating hotels' participation in social media, we can clearly establish a positive relationship between level of involvement and success. From effectively using Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and blogging, the following are examples of how hotels have been engaging in various social media platforms.

Case Study: Wyndham Hotels & Resorts

Wyndham Worldwide is taking online guest interaction one step further by adopting a more targeted approach. Their newly launched "Women on Their Way" microsite is a "soft sell" forum for Wyndham to not only subtly advertise female-friendly trip packages but gain valuable insight about guests' actual trip planning processes and holiday desires. Organized as a community, members can chat about travel ideas and share opinions about destinations, events and, of course, hotels.

Conversational topics have been suggested, such as Girlfriend Getaways, Destination Weddings, GLBT-friendly vacations, and Voluntourism.

Case Study: Marriot International

The Marriot Resort & Stellaris Casino in Puerto Rico uses YouTube to let guests record a 30-second video postcard to send to friends and family through the resort's YouTube channel.

Marriott Resorts Hawaii and its partners, Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau, Hawaiian Airlines, and Hertz, are making interacting with their brands easy by giving away free trips to the Hawaiian Islands with the "Tweet Yourself to Hawaii" sweepstakes. Designed to promote the islands through social media networks, this innovative and cre-

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Word-of-mouth spreads fast, and in the virtual world, it spreads even faster to a much wider audience. Positive interactions are important to build relationships and brand loyalty. There are several difference markets that hotels can reach using social media – families, business travelers, leisure travelers, and niche markets. One messaging strategy likely won't fit all, so don't be afraid to diversify.

ative viral campaign coincides with Hawaii's 50th anniversary of statehood. To win, users are asked to submit a video that best showcases why they love Hawaii. The public will judge on their favorite from a selection of finalists.

Case Study: Kimpton's Hotel Palomar

Instead of the typical vacation or free night giveaway, the funky Kimpton Hotel Palomar rewarded 20 of its Twitter followers with free animal print bathrobes, which provided a cost-efficient way to show customer appreciation while capitalizing on what customers love about the brand. Some of the excited Tweeters spread Kimpton's message further by blogging about their prize.

Case Study: InterContinental Hotels & Resorts

InterContinental (IHG) partnered with Communispace to build and facilitate three private online communities of some 300 members each, all members of IHG's loyalty program. At the core of the approach to social marketing is the idea that IHG puts its customer at the center of everything. The company recently expanded its social media marketing footprint by launching a public community open to Priority Club Rewards



members. IHG also utilizes third-party social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

InterContinental recently equipped its concierge staff at its New York, Atlanta, Hong Kong, and London hotels with Apple iPads. The brand hopes the iPad will revolutionize their concierge experience by providing high-resolution satellite maps, close-up street views, video clips of local attractions, directions to a requested location, and customized InterContinental content.

Case Study: Sheraton Hotels

In December of 2009, Sheraton Hotels launched a new social media platform "Sheraton Shared Moments" which enables users to share their travel experiences with friends and family and the public via the Internet. Those who sign up to the portal and share their moments also have the chance to win one of five dream holidays to a luxury Sheraton Hotel or Resort. Simply by uploading a photo, saying where it was taken, how it felt and what made this moment special, and then by answering a few questions on your travel likes and dislikes, users will be entered into the competition to win one of five week-long stays in a

Banking Checklist

1. **Use a relevant name.**
Make your account names easily searchable and relevant to your brand.
2. **Strategically create content.**
Don't just push out information. Think about what content would be most valuable to your audience.
3. **Remember, it's a conversation.**
Talk to your audience like you would talk to real people. Avoid contrived speech or industry jargon. Use content that is open-ended and inviting.
4. **Consistently update your content.**
Manage the sites effectively by being current and up-to-date with content so customers return to the site for new updates and information.
5. **Integrate your efforts.**
Tie social media into your other marketing efforts by focusing on the same underlying message about your brand and adding your social sites to your print materials.

Sheraton hotel best suited to their travel preferences – be that Milan, Lisbon, Stockholm, Tenerife, or even the Red Sea in Egypt!

"Today's traveler is part of an online digital community and Sheraton is committed to helping guests stay connected to friends, family, and colleagues whilst on the road. Sheraton has launched a range of initiatives including a lobby-based signature communication hub, Link@Sheraton experienced with Microsoft, which provides Internet enabled PC work stations and free WI-FI so guests can remain fully productive and connected to what matters most to them whilst away from home. In addition, through Facebook Connect and now Shared Moments, Sheraton is empowering travelers to share and inspire each other in a new and exciting way," Susanne Barfoed, VP of Brand Management for Sheraton Hotels & Resorts, said about the brand's social media initiatives.



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their guests as possible, and this “social media” experience as a guest of the Garden Court Hotel makes customers appreciate the little touches people do - which defines their approach to customer service.

Case Study: Hyatt Hotels & Resorts

Hyatt has implemented a Twitter concierge service in their locations around the world. The Twitter service is available to guests of the hotel 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is designed to help guests ask questions, book spa appointments or dinner reservations, and make special requests. Fans have begun to embrace the @HyattConcierge Twitter account – which currently has over 11,000 followers. The accounts are staffed 24/7 by customer service agents around the world. Hyatt already provides round-the-clock service by phone and email, so translating their strategy online was just a matter of training the agents to type responses in 140 characters or less.

“Whatever we did, it had to be with the theme of going the extra mile, providing additional service. We really believe that it is a concierge service rather than a promotion tool,” said John Wallis, global head of marketing for Hyatt, said about the company’s Twitter strategy.

Social Media for Recruiting

There is no doubt that social media is the hottest topic in recruiting these days, and Hyatt’s Facebook page demonstrates exactly why that is the case. Hyatt’s Facebook page is branded with a ‘HyattCareers’ URL which makes it easy to find for the page’s over 15,000 fans. Most importantly, there is a real dialogue going on between job seekers and people within Hyatt. Comments from job seekers posted to Hyatt’s wall are answered individually in a timely manner with thorough, thoughtful replies. While most answer direct people to www.ExploreHyatt.jobs, there is usually some personalization in the answer, providing an indication that the comments are actually being read by someone who is interested in engaging with Hyatt’s fans, customers, and potential job candidates.

In terms of job listings (which are powered by LinkUp’s Facebook app ‘Current Jobs at Our Company’), Hyatt lists 968 jobs from their company career portal on their Facebook page. These jobs appear in a widget on their Wall, as well as on a separate jobs tab across the top. This makes it easy for fans and job seekers to find current opportunities at Hyatt from throughout their hotel and resort network, and each and every job listing links directly to that specific position on Hyatt’s career page where job seekers can apply for jobs straight into Hyatt’s applicant tracking system (ATS).

Case Study: High Peak Resorts

The Adirondack High Peaks is not just the name of the

Case Study: The Gainey Suites Hotel

The Gainey Suites and Hotel in Scottsdale has a strong Twitter following along with videos on YouTube and attractive property shots on its Flickr photo sharing site. The high-end destination uses Facebook to feature hotel special events and promotions that leverage its current number-one TripAdvisor ranking.

“Social media gives our hotel freedom to do creative things online we cannot do on our website,” Rich Newman, general manager of the Gainey Suites Hotel, said. “We use Maestro’s ResWave booking engine on our website with links to our social media pages. Our link to YouTube videos on the ResWave page drives business because guests can see rich-media hotel presentations and book rooms immediately. Our social media strategy generates hundreds of room-nights and adds to our F&B business.”

Gainey Suites links its Maestro ResWave booking page to property photos, floor plans and enhanced room descriptions.

“Chains have corporate social media programs, but are constrained by policy guidelines. Independents like Gainey Suites can respond to market changes and promote their hotels with a creative style that builds an image of a unique, personalized, destination that people respond to by making reservations,” Newman said.

Case Study: The Garden Court Hotel

The Garden Court Hotel in Palo Alto, uses social media to improve one-on-one guest relations. When blogger Jeff Pulver stayed at their hotel earlier this year, he noticed something special upon check-out. Jeff had received a personal note from their general manager, Barbara Gross, referencing a blog post he had written earlier that week. The fact that Barbara made the effort to research one of their guests and then write something personal about it on a handwritten note added a very special personal touch to Jeff’s stay, and it was something he had never experienced in the past. The Garden Court Hotel makes an effort to research and personally communicate with as many of

collection of 46 mountain peaks in Adirondack Park – it’s also the namesake of the High Peaks Resort, which boasts a very creative social media plan. For example, in Spring 2009 it was all about the number “46” as the Resort’s friends, fans and followers on Facebook and Twitter took advantage of a 46-minute per day, 46-day promotion based on the elevations of the High Peaks. For example, a rate based on the 4,867-foot elevation of Whiteface Mountain was \$48.67. A rate based on the 4,361-foot elevation of Seward Mountain was \$43.61; Porter Mountain’s rate was \$40.59. The Elevation Rate appeared on the High Peaks website between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. and the Resort alerted friends, fans and followers when that day’s rate was available. While these rates are certainly low for this caliber or hotel, it filled rooms during a typically slow season and also garnered substantial publicity.



Mistakes Hotels are Making with Social Media

Given the viral nature of social media, it is inevitable that some individuals or entities may find that the incorrect use of it has actually damaged their reputations.

Using these tools incorrectly, such as ignoring rules about transparency, honesty, and trust, can do more damage to a site’s reputation and media attention than taking the extra time to understand your audience’s expectations and remaining patient as social media contributes to your long-term growth plan. As review sites reach into the social media tool bag, they must be aware of the impact of their actions and understand exactly how these tools work.

To help hotels understand the potential pitfalls of social media, we have identified common guidelines that review sites can use to thwart negative feedback from their community:

- * Be upfront about any advertisers or sponsored content.
- * Don’t use manipulation or bribery to gain reviews or advertising.
- * Be transparent about your mission, motives, and methods.
- * Provide consistent, valuable content and interact with your audience.

How Should YOU Use Social Media?

Social Media is an excellent tool to positively promote your hotel to your desired audience, by allowing them to become actively involved. We have created a list of tools that we recommend you consider engaging in, which will increase your site’s popularity and reviews.

- * Create a Facebook page – be sure to continuously add engaging content and respond to posts.
- * Actively involve yourself in a Twitter account, & show participation by following others.
- * Seek out & interact with your audience.
- * Create a blog where your audience can find industry-related tips and trends while communicating their opinion on current topics.
- * Use sites such as Flickr and YouTube to promote your site, by uploading photos and videos for your audience to access and link to their own accounts.

About Social Media Solutions LLC

Many social media campaigns transcend across channels such as marketing, public relations, and sometimes even customer service, depending on the goals of the campaign. To effectively manage these needs, a social media agency must essentially be an extension of the client, involved with various communication channels within the client’s organization in order to communicate the right content and the right time.

Social Media Solutions prides itself on becoming an extension of your business. Not only will we work your account as if we were promoting our own business, but we will also continue to brainstorm and develop new online marketing and social media strategies to optimize your business.

To learn more about Social Media Solutions, visit our website at <http://www.socialmediasolutionsllc.com>.

 <http://facebook.com/socialmediasolutionsllc>

 http://twitter.com/sms_connect

