



[CLICK HERE FOR THE FREE WHITE PAPER:](#)
 "Scheduling in the Dining Industry: Leveraging Enterprise-Level Automated Forecasting and Scheduling Software"

Receive the Daily Digest [Add me!](#)

[Home](#) [Hotel Business Review](#) [Hotel Newswire](#)

Hotel Business Review

Best practices in hotel management and operations...

[Share](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Google+](#) | [PURCHASE PDF ARTICLE](#)



Mr. King

Public Relations & Social Media

The Secrets of Successful Social Media Marketing

By [Robert King](#) General Manager, Travel & Hospitality, ClickSquared

If you've been reading my articles regarding optimizing guest (and travel agent) communications, then you've probably noticed that there is no one "silver bullet" that does the trick. Rather, communications must be integrated and orchestrated for maximum impact: this is the essence of cross-channel marketing.

It's no different with social media marketing -- the "new frontier" for marketers today.

Just to be sure we're on the same page, social media marketing is the use of social networks, online communities, blogs, wikis or any other online collaborative media for marketing, sales, public relations and customer service. Usually when consumers think of social media, sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube spring to mind. These communities give people a way to connect on a more personal level, enabling them to create content to share with family, friends, co-workers and other like-minded individuals.

It's all about conversation, and the first and most important part of any good conversation is the ability to listen. For marketers, social media, at its essence, is primarily a listening post into customer sentiment.

The Evolution of Social Media Marketing

How is social media marketing different than other kinds of marketing? Traditionally, marketers have created marketing campaigns based on specific events, promotions, product launches, etc. They've been in the driver's seat -- they decide the message, the medium, and the recipient. With social media marketing the marketer becomes a "facilitator". You engage in a "conversation" rather than deliver a monologue. While initially passive in this space, marketers are now active participants in the conversation and using community dynamics to their advantage.

This new phenomenon is giving marketers a more effective way to engage their customers and, more importantly, to measure that engagement. You can find out where they're following you, their specific interests, how they feel about you and what they expect from you.

But this space is still very much the next frontier. While marketers increasingly use social media insights to measure brand image, the "holy grail" is for customer-level social media interaction data to be fed into their marketing database in order to create a more comprehensive understanding of each customer. The objective is to have a more nuanced view of each guest, and to use that understanding to create more targeted and personalized cross-channel communications.

The Value of Social Media Marketing for T&H

Does social media pass the "worth it" test for travel & hospitality marketers? What are the benefits, both from a guest and hospitality provider perspective, which can be derived through social media participation?

For the Guest:

- Most importantly, it gives them a voice. Whether the feedback is favorable or unfavorable, this direct line gives guests a personal connection to your organization and positively impacts loyalty.
- It empowers them to be an influencer within their community. They get to provide "insider information" to other community members. Posting feedback on their stay enhances their image as the resident expert.
- By participating in the online community you have created, guests can take advantage of your promotions, gifts, or special events. This is a win/win for both the customer and the resort.

For the organization:

Robert King's articles



[The Secrets of Successful Social Media Marketing](#)

By Robert King, General Manager, Travel & Hospitality, ClickSquared



[Integrating Direct Marketing and Web Marketing Efforts](#)

By Robert King, General Manager, Travel & Hospitality, ClickSquared



[New Approaches to Filling the White Space](#)

By Robert King, General Manager, Travel & Hospitality, ClickSquared



[Travel Agents: Don't Ignore Them](#)

By Robert King, General Manager, Travel & Hospitality, ClickSquared

Hotel Business Review Public Relations & Social Media



[Planning a PR Strategy: Don't shoot from the hip](#)

By Georgi Bohrod, Principal, GBG & Associates



[Hotel PR: The News Release Revisited](#)

By Mary Gendron, President, Middleton & Gendron, Inc.



[Developing a Comprehensive PR Strategy for Your Hotel](#)

By Gini Dietrich, Founder & CEO, Arment Dietrich Inc.



[Cultural Diversity - A World of Opportunity](#)

By Andrew Freeman, President, Andrew Freeman & Company



[Developing a Comprehensive PR Plan for Your Hotel](#)

By Gini Dietrich, Founder & CEO, Arment Dietrich Inc.



[Creating Brand Relevancy Through Brand Bonding](#)

By Mary Gendron, President, Middleton & Gendron, Inc.



[Making Social Media Work For You in the New Decade](#)

By Didi Lutz, President, Didi Lutz PR



[Promoting a Destination and In Turn Your Hotel](#)

By Didi Lutz, President, Didi Lutz PR

- It gives you honest feedback from your guests. It isn't always easy to hear, but is absolutely essential to receive.
- You learn SPECIFICS about what they liked and didn't like about their experience at your property and, even better, it gives you the knowledge you need to make the necessary changes.
- It gets you involved in the conversation. What your guests are telling you can give you insight into what you should be including and highlighting in your marketing programs. What makes them tick? What will make them respond? You also now have another channel to run promotions, distribute coupons etc. Test out special offers with your community – it's very low cost and you'll have a quick understanding as to whether they work.
- By allowing guests to register for specials and promotions on your social media site, it's a powerful way for you to collect email addresses and build-up your current marketing database. Another effective tactic is to drive people to your web site with games, contests, activities, etc. that are exclusive to the online community.
- Done well, social marketing allows you to develop an online community of advocates – it's like viral marketing on steroids. By giving guests the ability to post pictures, testimonials and travel tips, they will invariably invite their friends and family to visit your site. They tell two friends and they tell two friends and so on and so on...you know how critical word-of-mouth is in the travel industry. The more you develop a positive experience with your online community, the higher their level of engagement and the more likely they are to recommend your properties to others.

Social Media Marketing in Action

Social media marketing needs to be integrated with your other marketing channels to be truly effective. Customers don't consume information and interact in only one way, and your marketing efforts need to reflect this. Comments, reviews, photographs and video's uploaded by visitors and guests to social media sites can be easily used in direct marketing campaigns. For example, a vacation home rental site runs regular contests asking recent vacationers to upload pictures from their past trips –amazing kitchens, spectacular pools, etc. -- and then embeds that user generated content in future newsletters and email communications. These user generated testimonials, photos and videos add credibility to your marketing efforts, makes guests feel that their input matters (to you and others), and provides your marketing team a rich and virtually unlimited source of relevant, current content.

Organizations are using these communities as a place to introduce new products to their most loyal fans and gather early feedback. Social media is also being used to promote special sales and disseminate discount information. For example, a high-end handbag manufacturer announced their new spring line on Facebook. That announcement was then followed by an email communication employing many of the same images, and was further reinforced with a full-color direct mail piece that also leveraged some of those same visuals. It was a cohesive cross-channel campaign: its initial Facebook introduction gave those fans a sneak peek of what's to come, and consequently generated excitement and anticipation for the arrival of the spring collection that was unveiled in full using other media.

The use of social media can also be a great way to increase the size of your email subscription list. For example, the Boston Celtics recently launched a game called '3-Point Play' on their Facebook page. In order to play the game, fans need to register with their email address, and are given the chance to 'opt-in' to ongoing email communications from the team. Employing this simple strategy, the Celtics were able to engage their fans while also building their fan database. Again – direct email marketing is a critical medium in our industry, and the smart use of social media is an incredibly effective tool for increasing the size of your addressable constituency.

In an example specific to the travel and hospitality industry, a resort might want to engage more effectively with its guests. That resort could use email to announce the opening of a new location, and invite the recipients to visit Facebook to learn more about the property and encourage the guest to become follower on Twitter so they can automatically learn about deals and specials. After their first stay, the resort can follow-up with an email asking the guest to rate their stay and post comments and recommendations on the property's website.

An approach like this gives you FAR more potential to get key insight into guest interests and preferences, understand their stay experience and gather feedback about the resort. You can even embed user-generated content in your future direct marketing efforts.

A Few Tips on Getting Started

Start slowly by testing the waters. Invite guests to follow you on Twitter or become a fan on Facebook. Include the ability to share on your emails and throughout your web site. To see who's engaged, maybe offer a special promotion only good to fans on the social site and measure the response. Based on those initial results, continue to refine your offers and strategy. Social media is a key channel within any comprehensive cross-channel marketing program, and as a result, should be contemplated when you develop your strategy. It's very important that the strategy you plan and tactics you execute are tightly aligned with dynamics of the travel and hospitality market.

Be sure to adapt your social media strategy to your business model. If you're a hotel using social media as part of your on-boarding process, should you invite the guest to follow you on Twitter before, or after, their first stay? Keep in mind, social media vehicles should have

uniqueness in your cross-channel campaigns. Don't ask a customer to follow you on Twitter, and friend you on Facebook, without making each of those touch points unique to the dynamics of that community and its technology constraints.



Redundant communications and offers diminish the value of your efforts and are often counterproductive. It is better to start slow and simple, than to demonstrate a lack of understanding of the community.


In Closing

Social integration is critical. Step back and take a look at your overall cross-channel marketing strategy. Surf around and look at organizations that do it well and learn from them. Think carefully about where and how social media fits into your overall guest communication strategy. Once you've charted your initial course, start out slowly – and measure your results. Done right, social media marketing can be an invaluable tool for engaging with your guest community and differentiating your brand.

With more than 20 years of experience in the travel and hospitality industry, Robert King has held marketing, sales and senior management positions at a variety of organizations. Mr. King works with ClickSquared clients throughout North America, Asia and Europe to develop and implement highly targeted, timely, interactive customer relationship programs that result in increased ROI. Mr. King can be contacted at 480-603-9403 or bking@clicksquared.com


HotelExecutive.com retains the copyright to the articles published in the Hotel Business Review. Articles cannot be republished without prior written consent by HotelExecutive.com.

 Like  Be the first of your friends to like this.



OR

Log in to Facebook to post your comment

 Facebook social plugin