



How Hospitality Industry can benefit from social media?

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ABSTRACT

Since the advent of internet, the technological advances and its reach to the customers and new things are increasing day by day. It's an ever growing sector which brings something new for everyone. One of the major aspects of internet growing immensely is the social media and its use by various organizations to connect with the customers.

Today hospitality has also accepted this change in communication and now social media is an integral part of their marketing strategy. Hoteliers are aware that in today's world they cannot fool the traveler. Gone are the days when travel used to meant to visit a place first and then search for a hotel and tourist places. Today's traveler first checks the details online and then decides. To keep the pace with technology and traveler hospitality industry is taking the social media way

Social media is the big thing in today's world. With the whole world going on social media, it has opened a new medium of marketing for the firms. Hospitality sector in the past few years has adopted this new medium in a very positive way.

Social media as defined by oxford dictionary means websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social media marketing can generate highly targeted traffic while enabling you to communicate with your visitors and Social media marketing is defined by Cambridge dictionaries as methods for advertising products, services, or brands using the internet, by attracting the interest of groups of people who discuss them, make suggestions about them, etc. online

This paper aims at studying the ways in which social media can benefit the hospitality industry and what should be done by the hoteliers to develop a good social media strategy to connect to the customers better and to increase their revenue. We would analyze the most popular social medium platform used by the hotel. The paper would give insight to the internet medium used for correspondence and inclusion of social media marketing as a crucial part in the marketing strategy of the hotels.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing plays a very crucial role in customer centric industry like the hotel industry. It is very necessary for the hotels to keep themselves updated with the latest trends. Today the hotels are very much customer focused. They take out time to interact with the customers, to understand them and to provide them the experience they are expecting. Now even the feedback is not just taken on a piece of paper, the whole interaction has gone online now. In order to match the pace of today's customer and competition, hotels have included social media marketing as an important part of their marketing strategy. The hotel understands the today's customer and their needs and making their presence prominent on every social media that their current and prospective customers are using. First it is very important to understand the concept of social media marketing and the hotel industry.

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How it works. In a few words, social media are sites that are driven by a constantly updated and fresh content and fed by users as opposed to organized publishers. In social media we include **three types of sites:** 1) **The organizations website**, which has all the detailed information about the organization, it's history, working etc., 2) **The social networking sites**, like facebook, twitter, instagram etc where the customers interact in an informal way, 3) **The review sites** – like tripadvisor, four square etc, where the customers give a feedback about their experience with the different hotels and the services provided. It is the hotel's decision to use the different available mediums for interaction. The social media helps the hotel in many ways: publicity, promotion, advertisement, brand awareness to name a few

The hotels have started adopting the social media marketing strategy as a part of their marketing strategy to increase their

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN HOTELS

Social media technology is mainly based on three medium: - web, mobile and cloud. In the last decade social media has emerged as one of the most important and influential tool in marketing. Hospitality sector has also adopted this tool with open hands and almost all the hotels irrespective of their star ranking are using this tool of marketing. Social media has changed the

whole scenario of the hotel marketing; hotels now have to be very cautious in handling guest and especially their complaints because one bad experience can ruin their reputation badly. Few years back it was said that the most powerful marketing of hotel is the word of mouth of the customer but now thanks to social media it is the word of million mouths that affect the hotel business. In order to get positive results from such marketing, it is very essential for a hotel property to adopt proper and most suitable social media channels.

The social media helps the hotel to reach to large volume of customer with just one click. If used in the correct manner, the social media can benefit the hotel in many ways like marketing, promotion, sales, brand awareness etc.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Therefore, it appears necessary to investigate the benefits the social media can incorporate in hotels and how the hotels should utilize the power of social media.

LIMITATIONS

- With such wide range of online marketing uses and benefits present in the market it will be difficult to generalize the benefits to whole of the industry; it may vary from hotel to hotel.
- The research work in this field is still restricted so it was difficult to gather all the information.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- The study analyses the ways in which hotels can adopt social media as a strategy.
- The study could also help the hotel to understand the importance of the social media strategy.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

Primary:

- To identify the benefits for the hotels from social media marketing

Secondary:

- To assess the optimum use of social media
- To offer the suggestions to the organization for improvement in online presence and marketing.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Knowing that direct internet booking are increasing at a pace of 50% annually, its more of a fact than a choice. Hotels have to get into the online world if they are to keep up with customer's trends. If people are changing the way they communicate and relate, then hoteliers must follow suit and adapt to a changing environment.

There are quite a few factors that go into making a hotel worth following on your favorite social media channels. From a follower's point of view, it could include the stunning photos of the hotel

and its surrounding area, beautifully crafted videos which bring the hotel to life or access to exclusive deals and a chance to win free nights stay.

Whatever the motive for following your favorite hotels, the one factor that remains constant is that the best hotels to follow add value to your trip and engage with both potential guests and existing customers.

NEED OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A question which commonly comes in a hotelier mind is why do we need social media. The Author has listed few reasons below that why is there a need of social media.

1. Social Media is the fastest growing category of Internet Marketing in terms of attracting new users. For example, Facebook has more than 500M users (source: Facebook). It is the next generation of Internet marketing and can drive traffic to your website and blog from different social media channels.
2. Social Media allows you to establish a relationship with your customer like no other media has previously allowed. It enables you to establish a 1-1 relationship where you get regular feedback on how your customers are reacting to your marketing messages.
3. Social Media offers an opportunity for you to establish yourself as an expert in your market. Use of blogs, Twitter, etc. can help you establish yourself as an expert in your destination. People like to buy from experts and like to follow experts on their blogs post, tweets, etc.
4. Rank in Search Engine's Latest Real Time Search Algorithm – Gain additional exposure and traffic when social conversations rank in real time search on Google, Yahoo, and Bing.

Now the next question comes how to use social media and benefit from it

WAYS TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION

Social media can be best used by following three steps: Create, Manage and Monitor

- **CREATE**

1. **Create and Upload Custom Facebook Pages** – Facebook allows the hotel to customize the tabs to tailor it to your specific hotel or business. Some best practices to follow while creating your Facebook page are:
 - Integrate Reservation widgets
 - Have an events page
 - Create custom tabs to highlight hotel-specific items such as meetings and conferences, things to do, etc.

2. **Create/ Promote Destination Blogs** showcasing local events, news, and specials. Information posted on the blog gets index right away.
3. **Search Optimized Video**
 - Create and promote a search optimized video about your destination, local attractions and upload them on Video Search Engines such as YouTube. YouTube is the fourth largest search engine and drives significant traffic.
4. **Photo Sharings**
 - Create a channel or an account on photo sharing sites such as Flickr and Picasa, then post hotel and destination photos on the sites. Tag the pictures with relevant keyword phrases. Pictures about the destination that convey information to potential viewers are more likely to produce better results
5. **Twitter**
 - Create a custom Twitter profile with the hotel's phone number and website address in the background
 - **MANAGE**
1. **Integrating and Cross-Linking Channels:** Once your channels are set up, it is crucial to integrate and cross network all your channels. Make sure that the social media icons are displayed clearly on your website so that consumers can get to those channels. Cross-link Flickr, Twitter, and YouTube to your Facebook account. Integrating and Cross-linking the channels will help you in optimization, keeping it fresh as well as in expanding your network. Bring live feeds from your social media channels into your website
2. **Grow Fan-base**
 - Facebook –Be My Friend – Become friends with organization which are most important for your business
 - Promote Facebook Profile Page – Upload email list of your customers, business associates and ask them to become friends with you on Facebook
 - Convert your friends on Facebook by offering time sensitive specials
 - Network with local organizations and grow your fan base
 - Twitter Follow – Stay connected and current by finding out relevant businesses in your area and following them.
2. **Press Releases and Articles** – Using online news channels such as Business Wire and PR Web to release Articles and news information enhance search engine optimization and web.

• **MONITOR**

1. Monitor Social Media Channels and Review Site

Hotels should actively monitor social media channels and review sites. The success of social media efforts can be measured in many different ways:

- Awareness
 - Number of friends & followers
 - Social media mentions
 - New relevant links
- Conversion
 - Track through promo codes
 - Google Analytics
- Relationships
 - How much interaction?
 - Who is initiating?
- Engagement
 - Unique visitors
 - Time on site
 - Frequency of visit

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

A Research Design is the arrangement of conditions for collections and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. The research is a basic descriptive research, defined as attempts to explore and explain while providing additional information about a topic. This is where research is trying to describe what is happening in more detail, filling in the missing parts and expanding our understanding. This is also where as much information is collected as possible instead of making guesses or elaborate models to predict the future - the 'what' and 'how,' rather than the 'why.'

Sampling Method:

Census survey was adopted for the study. As it was census sampling, the entire population was taken for conducting the research. Hence no sampling tool/technique was used to choose the elements of the sample.

DATA SOURCE

Primary Data:

The first hand primary data was collected through interviews with the hotel e- marketing staff. In addition to it discussions were held with the immediate supervisors, the managers of marketing department.

Secondary data:

The secondary data was collected through the company profile, the company manuals, and previous year records.

ANALYSIS

From the above study it is known that in social media marketing has gained a lot of popularity in the marketing of hotel's and more important that are the social media is being adopted and appropriately used in the marketing strategy. The hotels can benefit from the social media in many ways, if it develops a proper marketing strategy and incorporates the social media in a positive way to connect to the customers and increase revenue. For the same it is essential for the hotels to understand the different aspects of social media and how useful will it be for their property.

An important point to note here is that the property should know and choose wisely the social media marketing way to be adopted and to use it effectively.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, there's a wide range of advantages hotels can obtain by putting more time and effort in their online and social media requirements. Though generally a very traditional industry, hotels world wide are waking up to the fact that without a good management system to their Social Media they will face harder times operating in our growing virtual reality.

Social Media is an integral part of the real-time search algorithm. Social media creates real connection between companies and customers, and that connection equals purchase intent. Ongoing connection and relationship with your customers will eventually turn them into a volunteer marketing army. Make sure that social media is an integral part of your overall marketing plan. If you are limited on budget and resources, still keep monitoring the social media domain and do the best you can. Hoteliers, who want to be ahead of the curve, should invest today in the media that is fast emerging as the future of internet marketing.

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