

Topic | Social Media

Tutorial 40

Social Media For Tourism

This tutorial explains what social media is and what main networks are available to your tourism business

Reading time: 20 minutes

Prerequisite: None



1. What is Social Media?

Wikipedia defines social media as the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. Social media is more than a new way to communicate; it refers to **an entire online environment built on people's contributions and interactions.**

The communication in social media is done using social networking websites or platforms as they connect groups of people together. They replicate in an online environment the behaviours that people have in an offline environment (e.g. being part of an association or a special interest group). The online environment is extremely well suited to networking, as it doesn't involve location or time constraints. Anyone can participate from anywhere at anytime.

Leveraging off social media to market tourism products has proven to be an excellent strategy. However, you will need to be involved for you and your business to reap the rewards.

a) Why can't I avoid social media?

SOCIAL MEDIA EXIST WHETHER YOU GET INVOLVED OR NOT. IF YOU REMAIN PASSIVE YOU MIGHT LOSE BUSINESS.

If you don't want to start creating your own social media content, **we recommend you at least monitor what is being said about you online as anyone can say anything about you on the Internet.** The Online reputation management and TripAdvisor tutorials provide more information on how to manage your online reputation. If you stay passive, you might lose business.

b) How much time will I need?

It is important that you take time to immerse yourself and be a spectator in social media before you start creating your own content. First you should consider engaging in the social media networks listed in section 2a):

- Give yourself 30 minutes to one hour to set up your account per social media network (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor)
- First watch and "listen" (a good way to start is to conduct a search on your destination and/or your keywords)
- Then aim for one hour each week per social media network. Start by responding or engaging in existing conversations
- When you feel ready, start creating your own content to initiate your own conversations.

c) How can I get involved?

Social media networks are to the online world what an association is to the offline world. Social networks are the meetings, exchange of information and knowledge that derive from you being a member of the association. **You will only get out of your association what you put in. The**

same applies to social media networks.

As a small or medium operator, you may not have time to focus on a lot of social media. This gives you the opportunity to focus instead on quality interaction with a smaller number of media. You may be better suited to offer a higher level of individual customer service than larger operators. This individual, one on one relationship is also the core component of a successful social media strategy. You should therefore consider engaging in social media to gain competitive advantage.

Let's have a close look at the steps you should take to become successful in social media. There are 5 steps and you will need to follow them in order.



	Social media (online)	Association (offline)
Inactive: "I am not involved in any manner"	Examples I don't use social media. I have never looked at a blog, have never opened YouTube, and have no idea what a podcast is.	Examples I am not part of the association.
Spectator: "I watch but haven't joined"	I have searched for videos on how to play the guitar on YouTube but I don't have my own account.	I am thinking about joining the local chamber of commerce and have done some initial research, read some of their material, and know who to contact.
Joiner: "I joined but I am not very active"	I have now signed up for a Facebook account, I know the basics but I haven't really explored all it has to offer.	I am now a member of my local chamber of commerce but haven't attended a meeting yet.
Critic: "I am an active member and voice my opinion"	I have started to upload photos to Flickr and left comments on other people's photos.	I have attended a few meetings, met some other members and we chatted about relevant topics.

Creator: “I am the owner”	I have now set up my own blog, or made my own videos and posted them on YouTube.	I have become heavily involved and became chairperson or even started my own association.
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The above demonstrates that you cannot expect successful outcomes from social media if you jump the steps and are only using them as a means to an end. Just like being part of an association, business opportunities will eventually arise but they are secondary. Social media requires the willingness to genuinely participate and make a positive difference.

2. Social media networks

Since social media networks come in different shapes and forms, a one size fits all strategy is not suitable.

a) What social media networks are available?







There are key social media networks that you need to consider as they could help you successfully market your business online and distinguish yourself from your competitors.

All the social media networks listed in this section are free to use and are able to be embedded (placed) within the content of your website. If you do so (e.g. embed a TripAdvisor widget on your site) their content will then appear twice: on their respective social media sites (e.g. TripAdvisor) and on your website. To embed a relevant channel of your social media network you will need access to your files or use your content management system (CMS). If you have a CMS it should only take you a few minutes to place the video, map or reviews on your site.

Powerful social media networks.

A list of powerful social media networks has been provided below. Note that countries may have different sites (e.g. www.RenRen.com and www.Qzone.qq.com for China)

Audience numbers taken from network websites' media and about pages 19/09/2011

Name	Medium	Audience	Required Account Type
Facebook 	Mixed (text, images, video etc) www.facebook.com	800 Million + worldwide. Not restricted to clients or connections	Business page <i>Refer to Facebook tutorial for further information</i>
Twitter 	140 character text & images www.twitter.com	200 Million + worldwide. Not restricted to clients or connections	Standard account <i>Refer to Twitter tutorial for further information</i>
Google + 	Mixed (text, images, video etc) plus.google.com	25 Million + worldwide. Not restricted to clients or connections	Standard account
YouTube 	Videos www.youtube.com	3 Billion + daily views worldwide. Not restricted to clients or connections	Standard account with business profile <i>Refer to YouTube tutorial for further information</i>
TripAdvisor 	Text reviews & related images www.tripadvisor.com	65 Million + monthly visitors worldwide	Standard business account Can upgrade to paid account if preferred <i>Refer to TripAdvisor tutorial for further information</i>
Blogging 	Mixed (text, images, videos etc).	Any internet user	Part of your website or via a platform such as Blogger or WordPress <i>Refer to Blogging tutorial for further information</i>

<p>LinkedIn*</p> 	<p>Text www.linkedin.com</p>	<p>120 Million + users worldwide.</p>	<p>Standard account with business listing *Used for professional networking</p>
<p>Flickr</p> 	<p>Images www.flickr.com</p>	<p>6 Billion + images worldwide. Not restricted to clients or connections</p>	<p>Standard account <i>Refer to Flickr tutorial for further information</i></p>
<p>Pinterest</p> 	<p>Images www.pinterest.com</p>	<p>100 Million visits in February 2012</p>	<p>Standard account</p>

3. Developing a social media strategy

Social media works best when planned for. While you can manage social media accounts ad hoc you won't receive the same interaction and benefits as you would if you plan your content first. You need to create a social media strategy for your business so you are able to see a full bird's eye view of what is occurring on each of your networks as well as ensuring that you do not duplicate content on each.

a) What is a social media strategy?



A social media strategy is a living, breathing collection of documents or plans that are put together to ensure your image and persona on your social media accounts is strongly in line with your business. In its best form a social media strategy will maximise your marketing strategy and when used to its full potential will help you source bookings in both peak and low seasons.

A social media strategy is often made up of 2 main elements:



Conversation calendar

Use it to schedule in the different posts and initiatives you plan on publishing on each site. A good conversation calendar will take into consideration:

- multiple social media networks, products/services, traditional marketing and the high and low seasons of the year
- who will write and post the content

You can start building a conversation calendar in your diary or as part of an Excel spreadsheet. Simply note down any upcoming events in your area, specials you have planned, holiday periods etc.

Once you have your events scheduled use these to create corresponding posts or content that you can post before, during and after the event.

E.g. you could create different mini conversation calendars for each social media you will use:

- Facebook conversation calendar
- YouTube conversation calendar
- Twitter conversation calendar



Social media policy

This is the go-to document to ensure that the items in your conversation calendar fall within the aims and goals of your social media accounts and are constructed according to business procedures.

While building a social media policy may seem irrelevant at first, as you get into the population and ongoing growth of your social media accounts you will need to reassess the current position and how you are using the accounts to determine if you are getting the most from them.

Create a policy and include at a minimum:

- your goals
- the type of people you would like to connect to
- any standards that you would like to adhere to
- and what you will do if your social media accounts are sabotaged or used incorrectly.

View further information and examples here:

http://humanresources.about.com/od/policysamples/a/blogging_policy.htm

4. Measuring the success of your social media strategy

As with any strategy you need to be able to assess the return on investment of your time and resources. To measure your success start by defining your objectives:

For instance, if you intend to set up a Facebook Page for your product, your objective could be to grow the listing by 10 “likers” a week. If you are using Twitter to promote a new tours page on your website, measure how many visits were generated by your Tweet using TinyURL (<http://tiny.cc/faq.php>) and/or Google Analytics.

Every month report on your objectives and achievements:

	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Achievement</i>	<i>Relevant social media activities during the month</i>
Facebook:	10 fans	15 fans	Added 12 photos and 3 guests commented on the wall
Twitter:	80 new visits	104 visits	Tweeted once a week in the late afternoon

Repeat every month.

a) *URL shortening services*

One way of measuring the success of your social media strategy is to use a URL shortening service. These services will shorten your URLs into smaller ones (e.g. bitly.com/xdte8). One of the main advantages of such services is that they allow you to create different URLs for different social media networks and track how many times there were clicked.

A few popular URL shortening services are:

- www.bitly.com
- www.tinyurl.com

For instance, let’s say that you are posting a new photo of a conference on Flickr.com. The URL of the photo could be <http://www.flickr.com/photos/untanglemyweb/5834646704/>. Instead of linking to this photo using the long, standard link you could use a service such as www.bitly.com and shorten it to <http://bitly.com/umwfb> for a Facebook post and to <http://bitly.com/umwtt> for a Twitter post. Once you log into your bitly.com account you will see how many clicks you had on each.

Further information about how to measure each media is provided in the media specific tutorials.





5. Social media monitoring and management tools

a) *Why do I need to monitor my social media presence?*

Monitoring your social media accounts enables you to see how successful you are in your efforts and provides you a way of receiving feedback from your network. Without monitoring your accounts you might not know that people are “unliking” your Facebook Page or have stopped following your Twitter account. Missing these items could be vital to the success of your social media.

b) What monitoring services are available?

There are a number of tools and services available. The below table outlines some of the most popular and easy to use services:

Platform	Tool	What it will show you
Facebook 	Facebook Insights www.facebook.com	Number of people that like your Page, have unliked your Page or have unsubscribed from you in the newsfeed. Key demographics of your Page "likers", which posts are most popular and how often people interact with your page.
Twitter 	Twitter Analytics (to be released shortly by Twitter)	How much traffic your Twitter account has generated for your website, which of your tweets have had the most clicks and which content is tweeted about the most.
YouTube 	YouTube Insight www.youtube.com	Number of views, demographics, popularity, subscriber numbers, source of viewers etc.
Blogging 	Google Analytics http://www.google.com/analytics	Google analytics on a blog will show all of the same details you get for your website, clicks, keywords, popular articles, demographics etc.

6. Key learning outcomes

- Travellers use social media tools such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and others to research their holiday and also use such tools to share information during and after their trip. It is therefore important you at least monitor key social media sites your visitors may be likely to use.
- 3 of the key social media networks used by travellers are Facebook, YouTube and TripAdvisor.
- An effective social media strategy is usually composed of a calendar and a social media policy.

7. Related items

a) Related tutorials

- Bringing people to my site with e-marketing
- Blogging for tourism
- Online reputation management
 - TripAdvisor for tourism

Social Media For Tourism

- Facebook for tourism
- Twitter for tourism
- YouTube and video hosting websites
- Flickr and photo hosting websites

b) *Related websites*

- Twitter Search in Plain English: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGblWQYJ6iM
- Social Media in Plain English: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MplOCIX1jPE>
- Social Networking in Plain English: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a_KF7TYKVc