

Topic | Social Media

Tutorial 42

## Online Tourism Communities

*This tutorial highlights how tourism operators can engage in online communities to grow their knowledge and business.*

*Reading time: 15 minutes*

*Prerequisite: None*



### 1. What are online tourism communities?

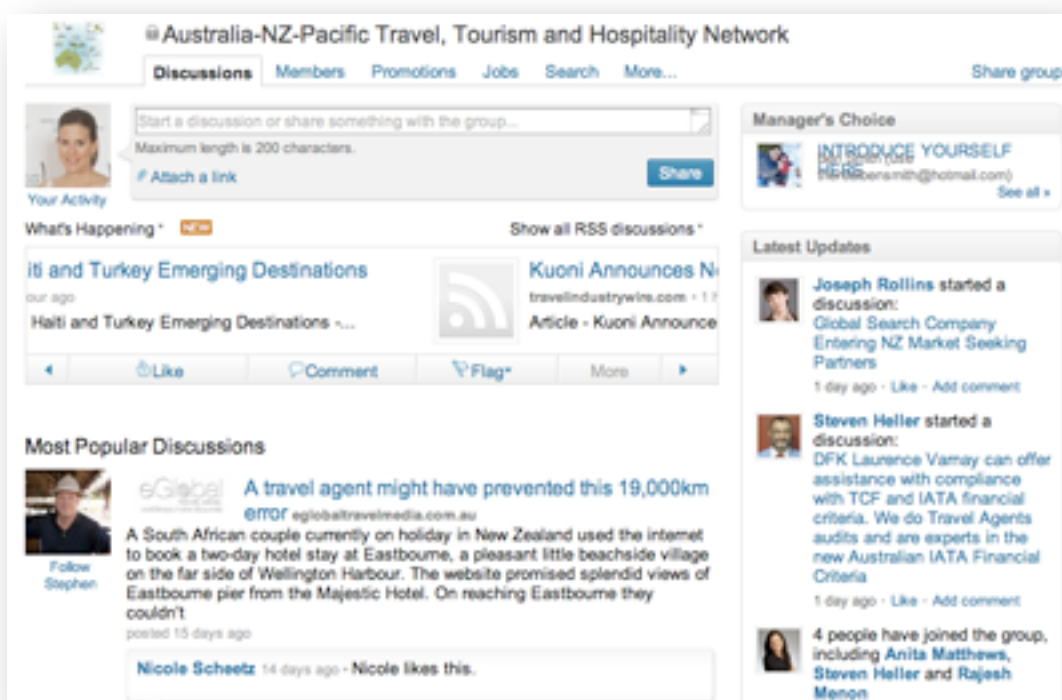
An online community is a virtual community or social network that exists online and whose members enable its existence through taking part in business to business relationships, education and industry networking.

AN ONLINE COMMUNITY CAN TAKE THE FORM OF AN INFORMATION SYSTEM WHERE ANYONE CAN POST CONTENT, SUCH AS A FORUM OR BULLETING BOARD SYSTEM OR ONE WHERE ONLY A RESTRICTED NUMBER OF PEOPLE CAN INITIATE POSTS, SUCH AS BLOGS.

As in real life, an online community is made up of members who discuss issues that are important to them, share calendars to discover events of interest and work on projects together around things that interest them.

This tutorial will discuss and review online tourism communities targeting business owners rather than clients.

Below is an example of one of the tourism groups in LinkedIn called Australia-NZ-Pacific Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Network. The group has over 1,100 members who discuss topics from training seminars, financial management to Facebook updates.



Screencapture LinkedIn.com







### a) *Benefits to my business*






One of the key benefits tourism operators gain from participating in online communities is being able to connect with likeminded professionals they wouldn't have had the chance to engage with otherwise. Other benefits include:

- Low cost or free
- Access to information 24/7 from any Internet connection.

### b) *Key communities that I could benefit from participating in*

All communities listed below offer free services. Most of them also offer to upgrade to a paid option for more services.

Community	Website	Service offered
LinkedIn 	<a href="http://www.linkedin.com">www.linkedin.com</a>	There are different tourism specific groups available. Below are a few examples of popular groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Australia-NZ-Pacific Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Network</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Australian Tourism Marketing</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Tourism 2.0</a></li> </ul>
Smart Company 	<a href="http://www.smartcompany.com.au">www.smartcompany.com.au</a>	Doesn't offer groups or forums as such but does have a community section
Flying Solo 	<a href="http://www.flyingsolo.com.au">www.flyingsolo.com.au</a>	Extremely popular forums for Australian small businesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://flyingsolo.com.au/forums">http://flyingsolo.com.au/forums</a></li> </ul>
Anthill 	<a href="http://anthillonline.com">http://anthillonline.com</a>	Highlights the inspiring thrills, spills, trials and tribulations of business development and rapid commercial growth
Springwise 	<a href="http://www.springwise.com">www.springwise.com</a>	Helped by a network of 15,000 spotters Springwise editors scan the globe for smart new business ideas, delivering instant inspiration to entrepreneurial minds
Facebook 	<a href="http://www.facebook.com">www.facebook.com</a>	Different groups exist for different topics

Tourism community	Website	Service offered
Twitter 	<a href="http://www.twitter.com">www.twitter.com</a>	The Twitter search functionality is very powerful. Search for keywords such as “tourism internet marketing”
Tnooz 	<a href="http://www.tnooz.com">www.tnooz.com</a>	Online community discussing tourism and travel technology changes and innovations. No forum but interaction via comments on blog posts.
My Web School 	<a href="http://www.mywebschool.com">www.mywebschool.com</a>	Australian online community dedicated to helping tourism operators with online marketing. Includes Q&A forum ( <a href="http://www.mywebschool.com/internet-marketing-forum">www.mywebschool.com/internet-marketing-forum</a> ), blog posts and online courses.
Tourism Café 	<a href="http://www.tourismcafe.org">www.tourismcafe.org</a>	Online community dedicated to helping tourism businesses develop and market their product
Savvy Operator 	<a href="http://www.savvyoperator.com">www.savvyoperator.com</a>	Online community dedicated to helping tour and activity operators with online marketing. Includes blog posts and forum allowing tour and activities operators to post questions and get answers

## 2. Participating in the conversation

### a) Planning your engagement

No two communities are the same. When you are new to a community it may be a good idea to first observe how that particular community operates before joining the conversation. Every community has rules and guidelines of some sort. They may be written down somewhere on the site but other times you will learn what they are by getting involved.

*For example, using only first names when posting in a forum or ensuring you only post constructive comments when people are seeking feedback.*

Depending on your communication skills and confidence level you could consider the few steps below before joining the conversation.

1. First select one or more community and join and be a lurker. Don't interact just yet, simply "listen" and read
2. After a few weeks, start adding value by responding to a few topics
3. When you feel confident, start your own topic
4. You may realise that you want to get even more involved and become a forum moderator or a leader or even start your own group.

### **b) What to consider when engaging online**

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When engaging online you should pay attention to the type of community you are in. Are you posting publicly (can your communication be connected back to your business) or are you participating in a private conversation that will remain between the people you are speaking with? This is often outlined by the type of online community you are engaging in.

*For example, a comment on a public blog that links to your website may direct people to your business if they want to know more about you. If you publish interesting comments this may be beneficial to your business. If you are publishing negatively you should consider how this may be perceived by the public (possibly your future customers or colleagues within the industry).*

In many online communities the discussions and comments are read and indexed by search engines. Search engines can be your best friend when the comments are appealing but they can also become your worst enemies when they index your comments forever in their memory.

*Twitter user "theconner" was happy as she had just landed a well-paid job from Internet company Cisco, but was not sure whether to accept. She tweeted the following: "Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work." However soon after the company rescinded the offer tweeting: "Who is the hiring manager? I'm sure they would love to know you will hate the work. We here at Cisco are versed in the web."*

*(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/twitter/5250680/Top-10-worst-tweets.html>)*

The golden rules are:

- Do not underestimate the power of search engine reading and indexing your content to serve it to users searching on the keywords it contains later
- Set out the parameters of the discussion upfront
- Structure your question and answer: support it with arguments and examples.

### 3. Key learning outcomes

- Online communities are a fantastic way for tourism operators to gain knowledge on how to grow their businesses
- Keep in mind that unless the community is closed to search engines everything you say risks being indexed by search engines and visible to anyone who searches.

#### a) *Related tutorials*

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- Social media for tourism