

Social Media Marketing Best Practices for DMOs

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Introduction

Attached are the results of a survey of how Destination Marketing Organizations are currently using social media tools and technologies. This survey was conducted by GoSeeTell in March 2009 and includes feedback from more than 190 DMOs. Miles Media provided input for the questions and assisted in promoting the survey to help broaden the number of DMOs participating. The research report provides a valuable snapshot of current thinking and actions in this area by destinations.

Social Media & the Internet

The Internet has been shaped by its community of users since its beginnings, long before “social media” came into the spotlight. Recent tools and technologies have made user-generated content and social media even more influential and integral to the online experience. The Nielsen Company¹ highlighted in its March 2009 report that, in 2008, the global use of social media tools and sites such as Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor has become more ubiquitous than email.

A recent major PhoCusWright study² into the role, activities and best practices of U.S. DMOs also highlighted that, despite DMOs’ high level of awareness of the importance of social media, many still lack a coherent and future-focused social media strategy. However, many DMO leaders reported in this research that social media will be an important area of online investment in the coming year.

Given the challenging economy, travel market and funding environment facing DMOs, it is critical that this investment is well-planned, well-executed and focused on results.

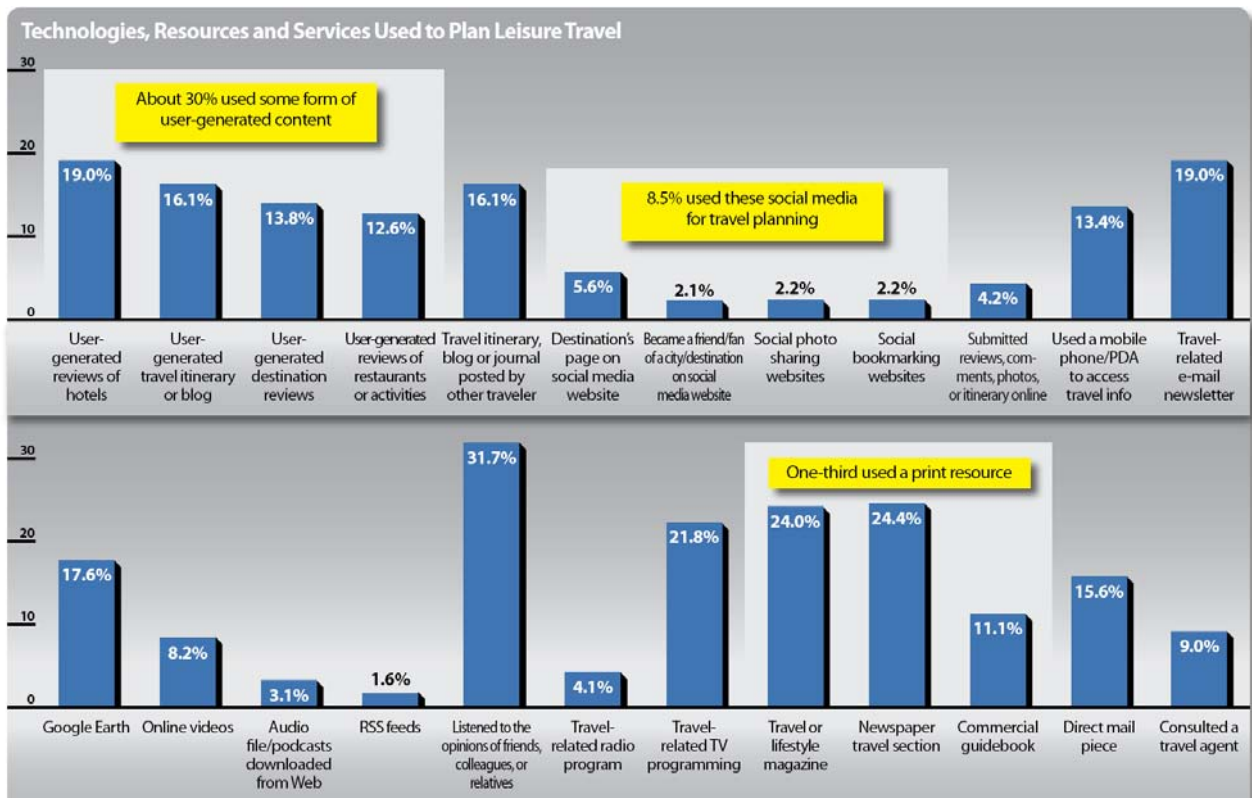


Figure 1. Getting Social – destinations such as the State of Louisiana (working with Miles Media) are using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, BlipFM and blogs to engage with an online community.

Current Use of Social Media

There is a wide range of social media tools and user-generated content available and their use in travelers' destination and planning decisions varies widely. While reviews, ratings and related travel community sites such as TripAdvisor are used by a significant number of U.S. leisure travelers (30%, *State of the American Traveler research*³), some newer social media tools such as Twitter are still just emerging. The latest "State of the American Traveler" research³ noted that less than 1% of U.S. leisure travelers reported using Twitter in their travel planning process. By comparison, more than 19% of leisure travelers³ used email in their travel planning. While tools such as Twitter are rapidly growing in their use and popularity, DMOs with limited resources will need to prioritize different areas of online marketing, including social media, based on their current impact, as well as their longer-term potential. With this in mind, we suggest the following steps in developing a social media strategy:

Figure 1. The Importance of Different Tools & Technologies in Leisure Travel Planning.



Source: "State of the American Traveler" Research³. November 2008 and January 2009. Destination Analysts.

Social Media Strategy Recommendations

1. **Monitor.** Start by listening. Use these tools and technologies yourself and observe the ways in which travel content is used. Look specifically for content and discussions related to your destination. Look at what other DMOs and travel industry companies are doing, taking lessons on what is working and not working.
2. **Prepare.** Benchmarking, consultation and research should form an important part of your planning process. Research the needs and behavior of your visitors. Also, seek input from your industry, board and other stakeholders so you build support and agreement on social media steps that are right for your destination.
3. **Set Goals, Measure Results.** These first two steps will help you to set clear, realistic objectives for your social media strategy. Return to the goals regularly and make sure you have the right tools to estimate results, measure ROI and compare this to your other marketing efforts.
4. **Take Steps.** Take an incremental approach, working with your staff and vendors on small steps first and then building into more ambitious social media initiatives.
5. **Participate.** Using social media means joining conversations and becoming part of communities. Authenticity and transparency are the keys. When you are an interesting and responsive community member, your occasional marketing messages will be accepted, or at least tolerated, because you also add value to the community.
6. **Be Flexible.** Above all, monitor, measure and respond. Be flexible and willing to modify your social media strategy based on regular research – feedback that will tell you what is working and not working. The social media landscape is also quickly changing. Make sure your strategy is also evolving.

List of Sources:

1. "Global Faces & Networked Places." *The Nielsen Company*. March 2009
<http://en-us.nielsen.com/main/insights/reports>
2. "Destination Marketing: Understanding the Role and Relevance of Destination Marketers" *Research Report*. PhoCusWright April 2009 www.phocuswright.com
3. "State of the American Traveler" *Research Reports*. Destination Analysts. November 2008 and January 2009. www.destinationanalysts.com or www.milesmedia.com/insight

