

Social Media Optimization Strategies for Lodging Industry

Short Description: Social Media continues to grow in importance as the search engines take these sites into consideration for the SERP's (Search Engine Result Pages). Hotels that take advantage of this trend are seeing significant benefits in terms of online placement and revenue.

There's a lot of buzz around social media strategies for marketing purposes for businesses, and the hotel industry is still trying to grapple with how to gain from the newest trends on the internet. We have been experimenting with several different strategies around social media and its relevance to the lodging industry. Here are some of the findings based on our initial research. We divide the social media landscape into 7 different categories as per the chart below. This article will discuss how hotels and resorts can utilize some of these categories to market their properties:



1. User Generated Content

User Generated Content will be a critical element of Web 2.0 strategies. You will find an increasing number of consumer decisions influenced by user generated comments and reviews. In our opinion, this will be the single largest influencer for consumers looking to make hotel room purchase decisions. This will also become one of the largest differentiators for hotels and will allow good operators to win heavily over the poorly managed hotels. But then, that's what the internet is about – offering transparency to the consumer so that the better product wins. The first generation of internet applications offered rate transparency across

different hotels and the next generation of applications are going to separate good products from the not-so-good ones. The most popular channels include: Trip Advisor, WikiTravel, Yahoo Answers, Askville by Amazon, etc. Hoteliers can create utilities on their own websites that allow consumers to post comments. Of course, the comments, whether negative or positive, need to be displayed to have a fair assessment of the hotel. The best strategy is to issue a management response to negative comments so that consumers feel that their concerns are being addressed. If you choose to delete negative comments, you are engaging in a one-time sale and pretty soon your reputation will diminish with your hotel guests and website visitors.

2. Blogs

A **Blog** (also known as a weblog) is essentially a software or online service that allows you to quickly post your thoughts, interact with people, and promote your business or concept online. Blogs are similar to interactive online journals that update your website with fresh and new content that elevates your value and ranking with the search engines. Some of the key benefits of having a blog include the following:

- **Higher Ranking** – Posting a Blog pings the search engines every time new content is posted. This results in frequent search engine spider visits and much higher optimization and ranking.
- **Networking in the community** - Blogs help in securing quality links from other relevant Blogs by track backs, comments, etc. Blogs help gain link popularity and drive relevant traffic.
- **Blogs help in establishing credibility and trust** – Blogs establish a credible platform for online customer interaction.

By creating a blog for your hotel, you will be able to attract visitors looking for things to do in your destination. Milestone recommends developing blogs that are “destination centric” - meaning that they are pages discussing dining, local attractions, transportation, local events, etc. List your hotel as the featured property situated within the destination. With pages of the blog discussing all of the local draws to your surrounding area, you will be positioned to capture demand which you've never drawn in before.

3. Online Videos

Online videos are one of the fastest growing forms of media on the internet and we have discussed the effectiveness of online videos in several of our previous articles. The online video developed for Search Engines is vastly different from the standard videos. The standard video files are not optimized for search engines. It's the same parallel

as a search engine friendly website vs. a website that is set up as a brochure. A search engine friendly website can be found for different things within the search engines; however, to view a brochure type of website, you have to know the website address to get to that site. The search engine optimized video and standard videos differ from each other in the same way. Whereas the search optimized video can be found by users typing things relevant to your market on the search engines; to find your standard videos, the consumer needs to know the website address for the site where that video is posted. This makes the effectiveness of the 2 videos vastly different. Here's a link to an online video that has resulted in a significant number of views as well as an increase in traffic for the website.

<http://vallarta.grandvelas.com/video/puerto-vallarta-mexico-hotel-video.asp>

4. Personal Social Networks

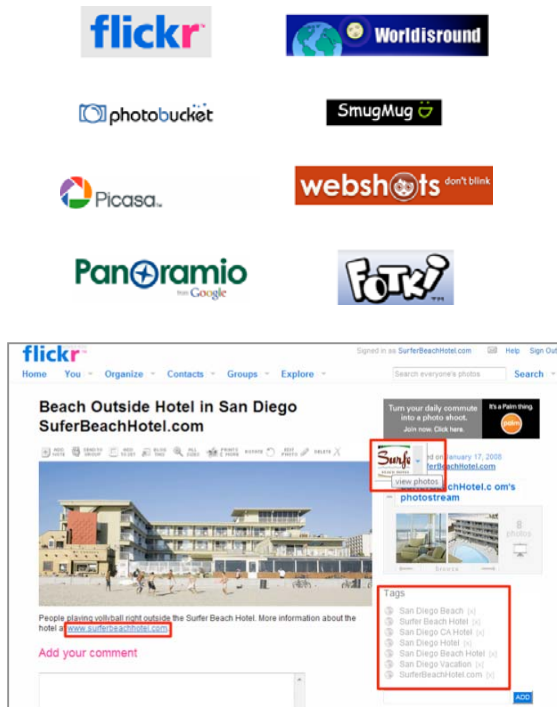
Hotels will benefit from utilizing different personal social media networks such as Facebook and MySpace to network with consumers who are interested in the unique things offered by the property. For example, hotels should create their profiles on Facebook and MySpace. If you don't like the look and feel of the pages, some of these sites will allow you to customize the look and feel to your liking (see example below). You can then post photos and videos on these sites. You can also socialize in the groups available on the channels, such as the Event Planners Group, Travel Groups, or even start a new group. This will allow hotels to increase their awareness with consumers interested in similar activities as those offered by the hotel.



Milestone uses several creative strategies to promote hotels on social networking sites. We use social networking sites like MySpace.com and Facebook.com to develop profiles for hotels and promote them on those channels. Additionally, we use photo-sharing and video sharing websites to promote hotels and share photos for the properties. Here's a link to Grand Velas Resort's MySpace Page: www.myspace.com/grandvelas

5. Photo-Sharing

There are several photo-sharing websites such as flickr, etc where hotels should create their profiles and share the photos of the hotel and things to do in their market. We have seen tremendous results from sharing these photos. Tagging of the photos under the right categories also assists with search engine optimization, resulting in not only clicks from the photo-sharing websites but also from increased rankings in search engines. The example below shows sharing of photos on the flickr site and how tagging is used to enhance results under an image search



6. Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarking is another creative strategy for hotels to enhance their website presence and search engine optimization. Different articles, videos, and the hotels website can be bookmarked using tags on different social bookmarking channels such as Dig, Delicious, etc.

5. Articles and Online PR

Hotels can use online articles and online channels to enhance their web presence and increase their search engine optimization. Using online news channels such as Business Wire and PR web to release articles and news information enhances the search engine optimization and web presence for the hotel.

We have experimented with all of the strategies described in this article and have found significant increases in the hotel's search engine rankings as well as online revenue. Social media channels may not result in direct increases in revenue from the channels, but indirectly do cause the hotel's website to generate additional revenue. For more questions about the social media strategies and our product offerings in this area, please contact Milestone.

Article written by the Milestone Social Media Team

Milestone Internet Marketing, Inc. is a full-service internet marketing solutions provider and an educator for the travel and hospitality industry. We provide solutions for developing powerful internet presence and driving revenue on the internet. Our portfolio of services include developing and promoting independent and brand.com websites, blogs, podcasts, RSS, email marketing, etc. We currently work with over 600 hotels nationwide and are a preferred vendor for several major lodging brands. Milestone is also a leading internet marketing educator for the lodging industry and offers its popular and widely acclaimed internet marketing training workshop and book – Hotels to HTMLs for several lodging associations, brands, and management groups.

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