

Social Media & Your Business: Just a Buzz or the Real Deal?



The fastest growing segment on Facebook is 55-65 years old—nearly half of timeshare owners are age 55 or older.

A Social Media Conversation

8/18/09 by Christina Wells

When I was asked to write the Developments November/December feature, the assignment had me digging into who in the industry is using or contemplating using social media platforms. The following discussion includes weighing the pros and cons of incorporating this media form into an organization's business model. My sources are Peter Giamalva, principal, Dartmoor Hill, LLC; Pamela Gould, president/senior vice president corporate relations, Island One Foundation/Island One Resorts; Clark B. Rowley, director of marketing/public relations/scottsdale, Camelback Resort; Chad Rutt, director of on-line marketing, LEISURELINK.COM; and Adam Schwartz, chief communications officer, Wyndham Vacation Ownership, Inc.

Okay experts, who's in the game?

8/20/09 by Clark B. Rowley

We offer a booking engine on our Web site as an alternative to customers calling in. This step has increased bookings tremendously. The minute guests confirm, they go right to our Web site to gather information and check out photos. We've just gotten into Facebook, which is a whole new area for us. We've created a fan page for Scottsdale Camelback Resort.

8/25/09 by Chad Rutt

We have presence on staple social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, StumbleUpon, Digg, and others, to build high-quality backlinks for search engine

optimization (SEO) for branding purposes and to generate bookings. We will expand to more major social media sites like YouTube, Del.icio.us and more, as well as getting exposure and interaction with our customers on niche travel sites.

8/28/09 by Pamela Gould

In the past, we have had a successful blog that has driven people to electronic newsletters and Web sites. We are currently retooling that blog and will re-launch it as part of our social media plan. Our Human Resources Solution Center Team is using Linked-in and other network sites in recruiting for key positions in the company. We are currently reviewing the use of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to compliment existing owner communication and marketing applications.

9/1/09 by Adam Schwartz

We are moving into the arena of social media at a measured pace. Our first step is a deep-dive analysis which considers the positives, and perhaps even more carefully, the negatives. Our biggest concern is that in the world of social media, the consumer's responsiveness expectation is "immediate."

8/18/09 by Christina Wells

It seems the approach is "proceed with caution." Would you share your take on the pros and cons of social media implementation?

8/20/09 by Peter Giamalva

Social media helps develop the bonds of a relationship. Whether the relationship is a common bond between owners or the developer and owner, it is a critical part of

Social Media is, at its most basic sense, a shift in how people discover, read, and share news and information and content. It's a fusion of sociology and technology, transforming monologue (one-to-many) into dialogue (many-to-many).

(Source: Brian Solis, Principal, FutureWorks PR)

the satisfaction criteria. Having a direct link or communication channel to discuss issues defuses conflict and allows for a better balanced perspective on resolution. That said, there is a commitment factor. A business must be willing to invest the time and energy to respond to all inquiries in a timely manner. Without that commitment, you will have created a relationship disaster.

8/20/09 by Clark B. Rowley

Social media operates in real time in the real world. Your consumers are actively a part of your network, and the speed in which this takes place is tremendous. We are carefully monitoring our efforts over the next year. Social media can keep your name in front of the consumer, but it needs to be tracked constantly.

8/25/09 by Chad Rutt

Pros: SEO and branding. Cons: Management of social media is labor intensive.

8/28/09 by Pamela Gould

Our position is one of careful implementation. Because this is an open forum, we are testing each venture before fully utilizing it. We recognize the need to be ready to respond to the good and the bad that will generate through social media forums. Just as we have a process for reviewing

and responding to on-line resort reviews, so, too, we will need the infrastructure in place to manage social media communications. This media will have huge implications on the position of any company's brand in the marketplace—the likes of which have not been seen since the launch of television commercials. In addition to handling the free flowing commentary, it is important to have great links to send the audience to that provides them with information they want.

9/1/09 by Adam Schwartz

Social media can respond to the need for communication between an owner and a company. Keep in mind that it has the ability to radically change the expectations of consumers who want their problem solved right now. This is not always easy when there is work required behind the line. For example, why can't I go to Myrtle Beach in July? Stepping into this realm is an exercise that has to be done with precision.

8/18 by Christina Wells

Let's speak to those in our business who are seriously considering an entrance into social

media forums. In your opinion, what forms of social media are best suited for the vacation ownership industry?

8/20/09 by Peter Giamalva

Feedback forums, such as Trip Advisor, and social networks, such as Facebook, are most relevant as they allow the customer to interact at their discretion.

8/20/09 by Clark B. Rowley

It depends on your product. If you have properties worldwide, possibly Twitter. The key is having a substantial Web site. Your opening page must incite customers and spur them to action.

8/25/09 by Chad Rutt

Large scale social media sites are great for any industry for SEO purposes. For a branding or sales impact, focus on niche travel sites and travel blogs.

Social Media

describes the on-line use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media itself, thus facilitating conversations and interaction online between groups of people. These tools include blogs, message boards, podcasts, micro blogs, livestreams, bookmarks, networks, communities, wikis, and vlogs.

Examples of social media applications are Wikipedia (reference); MySpace and Facebook (social networking); Twitter and Jaikue (presence

apps); YouTube (video-sharing); Second Life (virtual reality); Upcoming (Events); Digg and Reddit (news aggregation); Flickr and Zoomr (photo-sharing); Blogtv, Justin.tv, and Ustream (livecasting); Stickham, YourTrumanShow (episodic on-line video); Izimi and Pownce (media-sharing); del.icio.us (bookmarking); and World of Warcraft (on-line gaming).

(Source: Brian Solis, Principal, FutureWorks PR)

9/1/09 by Adam Schwartz

We'll use forums that focus on owner experiences—photos, videos, etc. Owners want a place that is all present and a form that allows them to participate.

8/18 by Christina Wells

Let's say I don't know much about social media. How can I become better versed in it?

8/20/09 by Peter Giamalva

Use it! Most social media are compelling since the feedback is usually quick and meaningful. The interaction between you and your customers will change before your eyes.

8/20 by Clark B. Rowley

Play with it. Surf it. Take classes in it. Roll up your sleeves and do it.

8/25/09 by Chad Rutt

Practice and stay up-to-date on social media trends through on-line/digital marketing Web sites.

9/1/09 by Adam Schwartz

Look at what other companies are doing. Engage your employees that engage in it. Some of our newest employees are giving us great information about this type of media.

8/18 by Christina Wells

Let's wrap. Would you offer up your best piece of advice pertaining to the use of social media as an aspect of your business model?

8/20/09 by Peter Giamalva

Be committed. Setting up a communication tool and then not keeping it updated and interesting will not immerse your clients in a relationship. Indeed, it will likely alienate them.

8/20/09 by Clark B. Rowley

Look closely at your product and how you want to sell it. Take baby steps. If you don't have the time to monitor your platforms, don't do it.

8/25/09 by Chad Rutt

Be ready to dedicate the time, as social media must be hit hard in order to be truly effective. A half-hearted attempt will only waste your time and potentially frustrate the customers you are engaging in various on-line communities.

9/1/09 by Adam Schwartz

Know that it is here to stay but not in its final form. The concept is still in its infancy, so the needle keeps

moving. You not only have to catch up but forecast where it is going.

9/2/09 by Christina Wells

Blog on. **D**

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Developments would like to run a more in-depth case study of a company's success in social media in a future issue; please submit your ideas to Kathryn at kmullan@arda.org for review and consideration.

Social Media: Here to Stay

Social networks are exploding in popularity. Forty-three percent of the on-line community now uses social networking sites—including Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn—up from 27 percent a year ago.

More than half of social networkers log on at least once a day, and the majority log on several times a day. Interacting with family, friends, and celebrities are among the main reasons people log on to sites like Twitter. The majority of users log on at home, although a quarter of social networkers log on at work, and 10 percent connect through their phone.

Social networking spans all generations. Today, about 19 percent of those age 55 and over visit these sites, up from just 6 percent a year ago. Women are more likely than men to use social networking sites (48 percent versus 38 percent), but usage has increased dramatically among both groups in just a year. (Source: The Consumer Internet Barometer)

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