

Social Media Marketing: Tourists Are the New Marketers

As the popularity of social media increases among users, so does the popularity of social media marketing among destinations. The key words for tourists and marketers in this constantly-changing online game are CREATE, SHARE and INTERACT.



In recent years, a growing share of destination marketing efforts was directed to social media tools such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Social media marketing seeks to engage customers with the destination, in an active state in which users become participants. Social media marketing revolves around social interaction, conversation, collaboration and the creation of online content.

In 2011, this marketing trend is gaining even more power, as the popularity of social media breaks all limits. For example, there are now over 500M active Facebook users and approximately 175M Twitter accounts. Even of greater importance, is that social media channels are becoming major tools for human interaction, in which people share information and learn what's new and what matters.



Social media marketing in 2011 takes the use of the audience one step further, shifting even more control and responsibility into the hands of web users. Within this context, the online tourist is now taking several roles:

CREATE. Web users are creating a tourism-related user generated content, such as uploading pictures and videos, share experiences and recommend attractions. For this purpose, a growing number of destinations provide online interaction platforms such as a Facebook page and a Twitter account. **SHARE.** Web users share the content they generated with their social network, adding more friends to the conversation and distributing the destination. Destinations might support the sharing process using competitions in which users have to gain votes or 'likes'. **INTERACT.** Web users interact with the destination, leveraging single visit to a long-term online relationship. By creating and maintaining relationships, the destination will echo louder and longer through the web, and in real life as well.



For example, 'Capture Jordan' is a new marketing initiative launched by Jordan Tourism Board in March 2011. In this photo contest, people who visited Jordan are encouraged to upload their pictures and compete for a prize. This simple contest enfold the key social media marketing components: users are creating content by uploading pictures; share the pictures with their network to gain more votes; and interact with destination Jordan, re-living their memories and supporting tourism for the country.

To conclude, as the popularity of social media increases among users, so does the popularity of social media marketing among destinations. In this constantly-changing online arena, web users are now becoming the center of a game in which they generate the content, distribute it and consume it. While the role of web users changes, so does the role of destination marketing organizations, required for in-depth understanding of new media, ground-breaking creativity and pioneering innovation.

By Eran Ketter

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