

# Railway Enhancing Their Social Media Presence

The social media is growing rapidly and influencing the societies around the world. It is even being termed as the “Wild Wild West” of marketing. In the transport industry, operators need to recognize this fact and adapt themselves to the changing scenario.



Whereas Facebook has 1.23 billion monthly active users (January 2014), Twitter has 241 million monthly active users (February 2014). Many of these people make use of public transport and they immediately comment on the services they use as to whether it is good or bad. The message is loud and clear. Operators who neglect the importance of communication on social media may face serious consequences. Therefore, the question is not whether operators should use social media or not, but when.

Passengers have deemed it fit to set up pages on their own in order to comment on the performance even though operators in many cities have not yet embraced the social media. Ms. Claudia Riegler, content manager for Wiener Linien, the public transport operator in Vienna, identified as many as 68 pages and feeds developed by co-creators to report on the activities of the operator when she initiated the company's social media strategy.

Among the transport industries, the railway sector has been relatively lethargic in engaging with the social media and deriving the advantages provided by them. It is believed that either the cost of maintaining an online presence or the fear of doing a bad job has been deterring them.

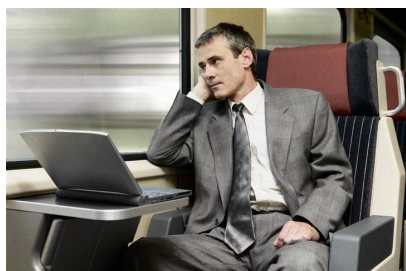
Interestingly, some of the operators who have established their presence in the social media are doing extremely well. Translink's Northern Ireland marketing executive Ciarán Rogan is of the opinion that operators should not make use of social media as a space to project what has not been done, but consider it as an opportunity to say what they will do.

News with photograph appears on Twitter and Facebook in real-time, even before the traditional media pick them up and report. Therefore, transport operators need to be in a position to quickly react. Translink quelled the impact of a damaging story which portrayed the picture of a rioter in Belfast wearing the company's uniform by responding immediately through Facebook.

The critical or challenging aspect related to the use of social media as a communications platform is

providing consistent, quality and accurate information. The feed should be live and remain active always. Passengers are very understanding. They know very well that they cannot get responses immediately to the queries they post outside office hours or on weekends.

In 2011, Paris Transport Authority started using corporate twitter feed to provide public information. In September 2012, the company launched 4 Twitter feeds. It has now grown to 15 different feeds covering metro, RER lines and tram with the number of followers ranging between 700 and 4400 for each.



Meanwhile, Transport for London took a cautious approach though the company had embarked on a social media strategy quite early. However, over 15 months they expanded from zero to establishing exclusive Twitter feeds for London's overground as well as underground services. This includes feeds for Oyster smartcard, Transport for London (general) and updates for road traffic and bus. According to Steve Gumbrell, marketing strategy and business management head, Transport for London, steady ramping up helped the company to avoid cost escalations and hiring of specialized social media staff. The evolution of the operator's customer relations strategy through Twitter has also resulted in a reduction in the number of calls received by their customer relations centres.

The training provided to the staff handling social media involves the use of tone in Tweets, ensuring accuracy of information, and how they can best to respond to some of the complaints. The training also places emphasis on how aggressive tweeters can be pacified by providing information in a firm but positive manner.

DB Regio's product marketing manager and a passenger, Anatol Scholz, opined that despite reservations about the company's Facebook presence they launched campaigns to target specific market niches instead of organizations. This resulted in the Bayern-ticket page amassing 57,000 likes. The page targets passengers under age 18 in Bavaria and focuses on fun to draw engagement.



RATP of Paris also makes use of the same approach. The company's Twitter feeds include specific events and leisure activities that take place in Paris. Sao Paulo's transport authority markets their BOM card as a ticket for participating in fun events in the city for free. This encourages people to visit their

social media sites.

Railway operators are in the process of developing their social media strategies and successfully engaging with the users. The rewards are definitely very attractive as indicated by a Twitter survey (Twerve) carried for Transport for London. The survey found out that 72 percent of people thought that the company's activities on Twitter enhanced its reputation and at least once in a day 81 percent check the feeds and change their travel plans accordingly.

Date: 2014-03-31

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-railway-companies-need-to-be-on-social-media-article2350>