

USING THE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TOURISM



The major upheavals that took place across the Arab world this year are once again proof of the power of social media. The social media proved to be a major communication vehicle that spread across the region like wildfire. The social media have not only changed the face of politics but also have a major influence on the world of travel and tourism.

There can be little doubt that the explosion of social media impacts every form of business including the world of tourism. Social media such as facebook and myspace, provide instant ways to reach thousands or millions of people, twitter is a fast way to get a few words out, and social media, such as linkedin connect people interested in business relationships. The social media allow people to speak about great and not so great experiences, to become instant critiques and via youtube to even become instant stars.

In the world of tourism there are two major uses of social media. Tourism's and travel's customers have created social media networks in which they share reviews of hotels, restaurants and/or attractions. These people often post stories about their experiences, both good and bad and as these websites become more prevalent they also impact not only a locale's reputation but also the way that we need to market and advertise.

To a great extent this is word-of-mouth advertising taken to a new level. Tourism entities, be they attractions, hotels, transportation systems, restaurants or communities may use social media as a personalized form of advertising. The use of the social media can help your tourism entity to enhance its buzz and create credibility at a low or no cost to the provider. The essential point to remember is that like tourism, social media exist to bring people together. To get some great (or better) results from your social media consider some of these ideas:

- **Do not doubt the impact of the social media.** The social media present a whole new world of instant communication. To a great extent the social media work in real time situations. That means that they have no system of checks and balances; both truth and fiction, praise and libel can spread across the world almost instantaneously
- **Be aware that the social media can be both an aid and a threat.** Not only do good people use the social media, but now misinformation, and plans for criminal behavior or, as seen in the Middle East, even revolution can be disseminated in mere seconds from one end of the globe to the other.
- **Know which form of social media works best for you.** The term social media covers a wide range of possibilities. Know which form of social media you are using and which audiences its targets. Myspace and facebook can be compared to mass media newspapers, as they have no one specific audience. On the other hand, blogs and content sharing networks may target a specific segment of the population.
- **Consider video sharing.** This is a great means to show off your attraction or community. Once again, the key problem is that you have no idea where it will be going or who is seeing the film. On the other hand, video sharing, like all social networks is for the most part free advertising and there is always the chance that the video may end up becoming "viral" and being seen by millions.
- **Use the social media to drive people to your website.** Make sure that your website does what you want it to do. Too many websites have so much text that they have become impossible to use. Make your website "clean" and user-friendly, but the principal pieces of information in easy to locate corners. For example, websites often hide telephone numbers. Thus a person going to the website so as to call for additional information simply ends up frustrated. Consider adding a blog and link to

facebook on your website.

- Consider creating social media parties, where people can meet and chat about your locale, and exchange information with you. For example encourage your visitors to share photos or videos of their tourism location in your community. You might even provide a prize or award for the best photo or video of the year. The key to social media is personalization. What you want to do is make your social media part of the tourism and travel experience and not merely another piece of marketing or information.

- Use the social media as a way to get as much feedback as possible. One of the number one problems in tourism is getting good feedback. Use the social media as a creative way to allow people to tell you what they really think. Use techniques that allow people to interact in a way that allows them to feel they are part of the process and have a stake in your success.

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