

Evaluate the Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing on Hotels

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1. Abstract

Purpose; The internet has forced companies to transform themselves to be more interactive, innovative and efficient as the online consumer is more active, demanding and in control; if unhappy about a service the hotel's reputation can be damaged as negative information posted online is instant and public; sharing their opinion with hundreds of thousands of potential customers. However, savvy marketers are increasingly using social media to let guests sell their hotels, which is authentic marketing at its best. Marketers need to implement dedication, time and resources in social media marketing to be successful and stay ahead of their competitors; most hotels lack the resources required to effectively implement social marketing strategies.

Methodology; This paper integrates triangulation to ensure all views of social media marketing are portrayed; three hotel marketing managers were questioned, consumers on PollDaddy answered polls and the role of the practitioner research was undertaken to analyse Cedar Court's Facebook campaign. Secondary research was used to develop recommendations for the effective use of social media marketing.

Findings; This paper presents the results of an exploratory study on the different perspectives of social media marketing. It was found that some hotels have more developed social media marketing strategies than others but all are willing to learn and develop. Consumers had mixed opinions on social media marketing which lead to calls for recommendations to be derived from secondary research for the effective use of social media marketing.

Research Limitations; More time was needed to research and analyse the Facebook campaign and a payable account was needed on PollDaddy to increase the exposure of the polls.

Value; Social media marketing is a fairly new trend; it will be a key factor in the future of marketing; Large hotels like Hilton and Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts have fully integrated social media into their marketing strategy, but for most hotels the difficulty is not only where to begin, but who to use and what to do; this paper will significantly impact how hotels market on social media sites.

Keywords; Social Media, Marketing, Hotels, Effective, Participation, Interaction

2. Context & Objectives

Long before the Internet, people shared their opinions of products with friends and family through word of mouth; '*a happy guest tells five others; an unhappy guest tells 9-10 others.*' (Kennedy, 2009) Nowadays, consumers are spending more and more time on social network sites where they can broadcast their experiences directly online via social media sharing their opinion with hundreds of thousands of potential customers; hotel marketers need to reach these communities and interact with them to stay competitive.

TIG Global (2009) describes how the internet has changed marketing; '*what was once an efficient one way communication tool has evolved into an interactive two way communication device.*' The internet is forcing companies to transform themselves to be more interactive, innovative and efficient. Kozinets (1999, p254) discussed that '*online consumers are not merely passive recipients of consumption information but active creators*'; consumers are now in control. The information the consumers post is instant and public; giving them the opportunity to be heard in large numbers. Marketers need to form alliances with these online consumer communities as it is the dawn of customer engagement; 'Engaged customers spend more money and come back more often.' (McClean, 2008)

Social media marketing requires participation, interaction and dedication (Raza, 2006); time, commitment and resources are essential for the efficient use of social media marketing; however most hotels lack the resources required to effectively implement social marketing strategies. Most hotels either don't do social media marketing or they don't do it efficiently; Weber (2009) understands that marketers have to be aggregators not broadcasters; they have to be part of the consumer's conversation, not bombarding them with constant sales pitches. (Evans, 2009) Marketers have to ensure their content is beneficial to the hotel and their consumers; they should not perceive the hotels presence to be a nuisance. Large hotels like Hilton, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts and MGM Grand have fully integrated social media into their marketing strategy, but for most hotels the difficulty is not only where to begin, but who to use and what to do.

Is it detrimental for a hotel not to use social media sites? Can it be detrimental if social media sites are used but not appropriately? The aim of this study is to evaluate the role of social media in hotel marketing. The objectives of this study are to;

- Evaluate how the internet has changed hotel marketing.

- Assess the key activities involved in social media marketing.
- Evaluate the role of social media marketing within hotel marketing strategies.
- Develop recommendations for the effective use of social media marketing in hotels.

3. Literature Review

Marketing

Raza (2005, p 2) defines marketing as an *'ongoing process comprising various co-ordinated activities a company must perform to develop and/or wanted product, bring it to the market, maintain it there and maximize the customers benefit.'* The customer is an integral part of the marketing process; marketers need to focus on their customer's needs, wants and expectations which will reflect in their services and result in a successful hotel.

'For many years hospitality firms have believed that the goal of marketing is to create as many new customers as possible.' (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999, p345) They believed it was important to satisfy the guests while they were on the property, but the real goal was to continue to find new customers; their interest in getting new customers dominated the task of keeping customers. Nowadays, companies have realized that both aspects are vital; finding new customers and keeping current customers; Chen et al (2009) suggest that companies exploit the internet to become more innovative and effective at this task.

Marketing using traditional methods used interruption techniques which consumers accepted as they classed them as necessary 'happenings'; the marketers were in control. But the internet forced marketers to transform themselves; Chen et al (2009) discovered that marketers were no longer in control; the balance of power had shifted to the consumer. The existence of united groups of online consumers interacting shifts knowledge and power from marketers to consumers; Kozinets (1999, p258) supports this; *'The more online consumption members communicate with one another through the internet, the more bold they feel about challenging marketers and marketing claims.'* Scott (2009) & Tuten (2008) realized that the 'old rules' of marketing were ineffective in a web 2.0 world; (consumer generated content) marketers have to work harder as consumers control their media content. Saugestad (2009) reinforces this; *'research shows that there is a growing proclivity among web users to tune out 'corporate speak'.'* Miguens, Baggio & Costa (2008) clarify that the internet is no longer just a static page, but a dynamic platform which allows consumers to independently generate their own content; sharing with other users and passing on their own experience. Marketers need to realize that online consumers are much more *'active, participative, resistant, activist, loquacious, social and communitarian.'* (Kozinets, 1999, p261)

Social Medias

It is important to ensure social media is explained to avoid confusion; '*Social media is about sharing information and experiences with acquaintances in your networks.*' (TIG Global, 2009) Weber (2009) noted that social networks are places where people with a common interest or concern, meet and express themselves, their opinions and 'vent'. There are different social media channels depending on the desired goals;

Table 1; Authors Analysis of Social Media Sites

Type of Social Media	Description	Statistics
Facebook	Facebook is a social networking website that was originally designed for students, but is now open to anyone 13 years of age or older. Facebook users can create and customize their own profiles with photos, videos, and information about themselves. Friends can browse the profiles of other friends and write messages on their profiles.	Facebook reports an average of 250,000 new registrations per day since January 2007. (Scott, 2009, p229)
Twitter	Twitter is an online service that allows you to share updates with other users by answering one simple question: "What are you doing?" Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read other users' updates known as tweets.	There are a reported 3 million tweets posted per day. (Social Media Statistics, 2008)
TripAdvisor	TripAdvisor is a free travel guide and research website that hosts reviews from users and other information designed to help plan a vacation.	90% of online consumers trust recommendations from reviews (Mclean, 2008)
YouTube	YouTube is a video sharing service that allows users to watch videos posted by other users and upload videos of their own. The slogan of the YouTube website is "Broadcast Yourself." This implies the YouTube service is designed primarily for ordinary people who want to publish videos they have created.	'Videos posted on You tube attract more than 40 million visitors monthly.' (Weber, 2009 p4)

'*Social networking continues to grow and shape the way people communicate.*' (Hotelworld, 2010) There are hundreds of active social networking websites, but the social media sites listed in table 1 are relevant to this project as hotels are currently using them to market themselves.

The internet is becoming one big social networking site; '*Over 44% of all internet users are active in social media*' (TIG Global, 2009) Saugestad (2009) & Miguens, Baggio & Costa (2008) argue that social media sites are the most

popular sites on the internet due to the fact it is available 24/7, giving potential online customers the opportunity to access information at their own convenience. Starkov & Mechoso (2010) acknowledges that internet users spend 17% of their surfing time on social network and blogging sites, nearly triple the percentage of time spent on sites than a year ago which is beneficial to marketers if they use social media effectively, as they are reaching a growing audience.

Using Social Media Effectively

Many authors agree that social media marketing needs to be fully integrated in the hotel's marketing process. Marketers need a solid internet strategy; merging social media marketing into their marketing plan and the hotel's brand; integrating videos, images and blogs to increase exposure and improve online positioning. (Davis, 2009, Raza, 2005, Tikkanen et al, 2009) Social media gives marketers an incredibly inexpensive way to build brand awareness, while doing it in a way that makes the hotel seem simultaneously hip, down to earth and fun.

Hotels (2009) explain how savvy marketers are increasingly using social media to let guests sell their hotels, which is authentic marketing at its best. Kennedy (2009) found that guests who have had extremely positive experiences do often feel motivated to post their positive feedback on the internet. Successful word of mouth marketing isn't about what the hotel thinks it represents; it's what the consumers choose to talk about; *'Word of mouth hinges on real consumers spreading the word for you.'* (McClean, 2008) It's the best marketing tool; with high credibility as it comes from previous customers and there is no cost to the hotel. However, if consumers have a bad experience it can be unfavourable for the hotel's reputation; *'a single negative online guest review can cause significant damage by scaring off future potential guests.'* (Kennedy, 2009) The scope of internet marketing is huge; numbers could be in the realms of tens of thousands of potential guests scared off from one bad review on the internet. Hotel reputations are at stake; consumers are going to be talking about how they were treated for better or for worse.

Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts has set the bar for social media customer service care; a guest went on twitter whilst staying at the Biltmore Four Seasons Resort to make a criticism about the hotel's music, to her surprise she received a bottle of wine and a note from the general manager apologizing. Another situation at Four Seasons Bangkok, where a guest complained on twitter about the lack of appealing movies on TV that night; management were notified and the guest was informed about the hotel's in-house DVD library. (Kirby, 2009) These situations show the effective engagement and participation required with social media marketing that results in high customer satisfaction.

Interaction, Participation and Authenticity

Social media is all about forming relationships, trust and building an online reputation. The main focus in social media marketing is to keep consumers informed and not to fool them. TIG Global (2009) explain that social media users

will likely be appreciative of hotel marketers updates and more inclined to pass them along to their networks of friends and family, if they feel the updates are authentic and useful. The main purpose of social media is social interaction and networking with other users; hotel marketers need to enhance their social interactions to be successful; 'the speed of the response is a significant factor in interactivity.' (Tikkanen et al, 2009, p1371) The stronger a hotel's genuine interactivity on social media sites, the stronger their social media brand will be. Starkov & Mechoso (2010) reveal that if a hotel enhances its social media presence on Facebook and Twitter, it can create a buzz around the property and contribute to increased awareness and booking considerations. Engaging and dynamic content can enhance a hotels presence and generate continuous interest; '*the online social media process is all about the 'word of mouse'.*' (Parsippany, 2009) Social media sites are all about customer engagement; companies who focus on engagement rather than selling will see success. (McClean, 2007, Tikkanen et al, 2009) By incorporating value, interactivity and engagement; hotel marketers could thrive with social media marketing.

Valuable Content

Evans (2009) advises marketers to ensure they have significant content on their social media sites otherwise they will lose consumers and search engine rankings. Consumers aren't afraid to tell hotel marketers if their content is rubbish but at least social media offers the ability to make instant adjustments in case they need to change detrimental content. 'Marketers have to provide customers with value to have a better chance of engaging their customers in their marketing activities.' (Parsons et al, 1998 cited from Tikkanen et al, 2009, p1369) Value is one of the most important things to keep in mind when creating great social media content that will persuade consumers to interact and engage with marketers.

Armstrong (2001) understands that marketers are sceptical about social media marketing but tries to convince them to use the internet as a sales and marketing tool; he summarizes that the issue is not only how to engage the consumer, but also how first to attract the consumer to the website and then to retain them; however this book is dated with basic knowledge of the internet and limited reference to social media marketing. Saugestad (2009) argued that successful social media marketing requires meaningful participation, authenticity and real engagement. Social media is a continual process of evolving and updating to ensure exciting and lively content; '*Involvement in (and success with) social media takes time and commitment.*' (TIG Global, 2009)

Future of Marketing

Hotels (2009) predicts social media will become firmly entrenched as a marketing channel in 2010. Savvy marketers will continue to shift marketing funds to online channels at the expense of traditional marketing methods which Starkov & Mechoso (2010) reinforce '*social media and mobile marketing are quickly becoming the mainstream in the hospitality industry.*' Accelerating technological

developments are evolving as a new generation of opportunity and challenge for the marketer. The issue with social media marketing isn't whether to use it or not but to ensure the time, commitment and resources are spent developing it effectively. There is a lot of literature around social media marketing but no distinct recommendations for effective usage.

4. Method of Investigation

An exploratory research approach will be used to gather information; a mixture of deductive and inductive; deductive as I want to find if hotel marketing managers find social media marketing useful, also want to find if the level of communication on social networking can gain loyalty from consumers or discover if social media marketing is beneficial to a hotel or detrimental to their image. Inductive secondary research will develop recommendations for the use of social media marketing.

Triangulation refers to the use of different data collection techniques in one study in order to ensure the data is correct and precise. (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2005) Triangulation will be used in this project as it will provide better opportunities to gather all perspectives on social media marketing and will allow effective evaluation of the findings. A mixed method research approach will be undertaken and data will be analyzed throughout the process; Tashakkori & Teddie (2003) quoted in Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, (2005, p 146) argue that *'multiple methods are useful if they provide better opportunities for you to answer your research question.'*

The role of practitioner researcher will be undertaken as I designed a Facebook page for Cedar Court Hotel Wakefield when I worked for them on my placement which I now manage. I plan to add 1 event and 3-4 status updates per week as well as requesting at least 40 friends. I understand it will be time consuming; I'm a full time student so all my time is spent on university work which does not allow me to be fully immersed in the daily events at Cedar Court. Therefore familiarity may affect the research as I don't have any up to date information to enable me to frequently update the status with current issues; I have overcome this problem by asking the sales manager to keep me informed. I will analyse the campaign for 3 months to observe the impact and responses from the hotel's social media activities.

Structured questionnaires will be conducted using purposive sampling (typical case) with three hotel marketing managers that are currently using Facebook to market their hotel in order to explore their opinions of social media marketing. The questionnaires will be conducted through email so the managers can complete the questionnaire at a time and place convenient to them. The delphi technique will be used to ensure the key issues are addressed; when all the data is collected I will distribute it to the marketing managers to see if they agree with

the findings and to ensure all the important issues have been illustrated. All three managers will answer the same set of questions to ensure reliable data.

From these questionnaires I will develop polls to ask the general public their opinions on social media marketing using PollDaddy as the sampling frame '*The larger your sample size the lower the likely error in generalising to the population.*' (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2005, pg. 210) Poll Daddy has 500,000 users around the world (PollDaddy, 2009) which should generate a good response rate; I am aiming for at least 100 answers to each question to generate findings that are representative of people who are interested in social networking. There is no limit to the amount of questions I can post as PollDaddy provides interactive polling, which I thought was relevant to this project. I will post the questions in November and 3 months later I will gather the quantitative data which allows easy comparison.

As well as primary data, documentary secondary data will be gathered from literature on the internet; journals and articles from websites such as e.hotelier.com/caterersearch.com will be used to develop recommendations for a hotel marketer to efficiently use social media marketing. Secondary data is unobtrusive; it will aid the project's objectives and will enable triangulation.

An external ethics committee is not required for this research; none of the participants will be vulnerable and social media marketing is a neutral subject. Participant error, bias or observer error shouldn't occur as triangulation should yield consistent, reliable findings. For this project written consent will be implemented, if participants do not want to participate then they simply do not have to answer the questions. Participants will be volunteers and will be adequately informed of the research; they will be free to withdraw at any time and if necessary the findings can be anonymous. I will monitor Facebook and PollDaddy 4 times a week to ensure the activity is sincere and will re evaluate the validity if I feel it's being compromised.

4.1 Research Agenda

From the literature review the key issues were highlighted and incorporated into the table below; these issues will form the basis of the questionnaires and polls.

Table 2; Table of Issues

Issues	Reference	Question derived from issue
The more online consumption members communicate with one another through the internet, the bolder they feel about challenging marketers and marketing claims.	KOZINETS, Robert, V. (1999) E-Tribalized Marketing?; The strategic Implications Of Virtual Communities of Consumption. <i>European Management Journal</i> . 17 (3) 252–264.	Do you find that online consumers are much more active, participative, resistant and more demanding?
Online social networking sites are the most popular sites on the internet.	MIGUENS, J., BAGGIO, R., COSTA, C. (2008) Social Media and Tourism Destinations; TripAdvisor Case Study. <i>Advances in Tourism Research</i> 2008. Aveiro. Portugal	What types of social media marketing do you use and how do you use it?
It is virtually impossible to compete in today's marketplace without a solid internet strategy.	RAZA, Ivo. (2005) <i>Heads In Beds; Hospitality & Tourism Marketing</i> . 1 st Edition. United States of America. Pearson Prentice Hall.	Do you have an internet marketing strategy?
Hotels need to merge social media marketing into the brand and the marketing plan; integrating videos, images and blogs to increase exposure and improve online	DAVIS, John. (2009) Social Media; Marketing Magic or Madness. [online] 16 July. Article from Hotel Online; News for The Hospitality Executive. Last accessed on 19 October 2009 at: www.hotel-	How important is social media marketing in your marketing plan? Is it fully integrated?

positioning.	online.com/News/PR2009_3rd/Jul09_SocialMediaMagic.html	
Engaging and dynamic content can generate continuous interest; 'the online social media process is all about the 'word of mouse'.'	PARSIPPANY, NJ. (2009) Introducing: CoMMingle Social Media Marketing Agency for Hospitality. [online] 21 September. Article from Hotel Online; News for the Hospitality Executive. Last accessed on 19 October at: http://www.hotel-online.com/News/PR2009_3rd/Sep09_CoMMingle.html	1. Does your social media site incorporate engaging and dynamic content for your consumer? 2. How often do you update your content on your social media sites?
Successful social media marketing requires meaningful participation, authenticity and real engagement.	SAUGESTAD, Stephen. (2009) Social Media and the Hospitality Industry. [online] 23 September. Article from ehotelier.com; the one stop website for hoteliers. Last accessed on 19 October 2009 at: http://ehotelier.com/hospitality-news/item.php?id=P171660110C	1. Successful social media marketing requires meaningful participation, value and real engagement do you feel you give this and how? 2. How often do you check/interact on your social media sites?
Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts has set the bar for social media customers service care; a guest went on twitter whilst staying at the Biltmore Four Seasons Resort to make a criticism about the hotels music, to her surprise she received a bottle of wine and a note from the general manager apologizing.	KIRBY, Adam. (2010) MGM Grand Billboard Takes Twitter to Masses. [online] 4 January. Article from Hotels; The Magazine of the Worldwide Hotel Industry. Last accessed on 6 January 2010 at: http://www.hotelsmag.com/blog/Musings_Miscellany/29691-MGM_Grand_Billboard_Takes_Twitter_To_Masses.php	1. If you find a negative comment online what do you do? 2. Can you give me 3 examples of how social media marketing has worked well for you and what was the impact?

5. Findings & Analysis

5.1 Facebook Research

The impact and responses from Cedar Court's social media activities on Facebook were recorded. Every week Cedar Court's status was updated 3 times, a new event was added and an average of 40 friends were requested; the campaign was analysed for 3 months to investigate positive and negative reactions of the consumers.

It can be immediately seen from column 2 that Cedar Court's friends have consistently increased, doubling the amount of friends it started off with from 323 on 24.11.09 to 692 on 19.02.10. The number of people adding Cedar Court to be their friend (column 5) also consistently increased, in the first month Cedar Court had 0-1 people requesting to be their friend but towards the end of the campaign an average of 6 people were requesting to be their friend with a maximum of 8 people on 19.02.10. The popularity of Cedar Court definitely increased; at the start only 1 person 'liked' the status, then only 1 person commented on the second status, gradually throughout the weeks more people started to 'like' and comment on the statuses. Towards the end of the campaign an average of 30 people were 'liking' the status and an average of 3 people were commenting; the Valentine's Day status (15.02.10) had 70 friends 'like' it and 3 comments which is significant.

Generally, the popularity of Cedar Court's profile did increase however there was a decrease of 7 friends on 24.12.09 which could be due to the fact 4 events were sent out the previous time or it could have been due to festive pessimism, after this incident I ensured I would only send 1 event out each week to ensure I didn't annoy any more of Cedar Court's friends. The number of people accepting Cedar Court to be their friend and adding Cedar Court to be their friend consistently increased, which could be due to the fact that more consumers are accepting companies presence on social media sites however consumers tended to 'like' and comment on the personal status update; not the sales pitch statuses, which goes against companies objectives to use social media as a marketing tool. All the comments were positive which is encouraging; this shows a positive impact as consumers enjoy participating in the personal statuses; they take pleasure in the engagement and interaction with the hotel's day to day activities; birthday's, promotions, new employees etc.

5.2 Questionnaires with Marketing Managers

Questionnaires were emailed to the marketing managers of Hilton, Marriott and Malmaison. They were given 1 month to reply; giving as much detail as possible. To analyse these questionnaires, themes have been derived to allow ease of comparison between the hotels.

Marketing the Hotels

At the moment all three hotels use a variety of sources to market their hotels; social media, emails, newspapers, tradeshow, search engines, word of mouth and leaflet dropping. All three also have an internet marketing strategy; Hilton explained their marketing team works together with their PR and promotions to shape this strategy.

Social media is important in the hotels marketing plans; Marriott have only been using social media for around 6 months and hopes to be fully integrated by the end of the year. Hilton acknowledges social media is a 'new space' and have integrated it through PR and partnerships/promotions.

All three hotel's use Facebook, plus another social media form, however they all use them in slightly different ways. Malmaison started using social media marketing after attending a 'future of hospitality' course and uses Twitter and Facebook to update promotions and news etc. Hilton recognised that conversation about their brand were taking place on Facebook and Twitter whether they were participating or not; they use the same sites as Malmaison as 'additional channels' for brand news and giveaways. Marriott started in response to their sister hotel having used it for several months and uses Facebook and LinkedIn.

Opinions on Social Media Marketing

Malmaison's opinions are mixed; they believe it is the way forward because it has many benefits but understand there are negatives and that hotels should be careful. However Marriott is not in favour of it; 'using sites that are not necessarily business focused as a marketing tool can cheapen your product and portray the wrong image.' Hilton understands the need for a sound strategy, time and commitment before adopting it; 'social media marketing should never be used in place of traditional marketing tactics.'

All three hotels agree that social media marketing is useful; Malmaison finds it easy to a point, 'its quick, reaches a mass audience, builds relationships and is relatively cost effective.' Marriott thinks it is cost effective and likes the 'speed to market.' Hilton states that it is 'extremely helpful in building buzz for our brand, sharing news quickly.'

Occurrence of Content Updates and Interactions

All three hotels interact on their social media sites however there are different levels; Hilton is the highest and checks theirs frequently throughout each day whereas Marriott only check theirs once a week; hotels on social media sites should be giving instant information; a week is far too long. Malmaison checks theirs as 'often as they can'; but this is a loose term and could range from Hiltons highest level to Marriott's lowest level of interaction.

Again, with content update the rankings were the same; Hilton was the leader as they 'post multiple messages to Twitter each day and add content to Facebook regularly', Marriott only update their content on average once a month which is insufficient and Malmaison were vague with 'as often as we can.'

Participation, Engagement and Valuable Content

Malmaison follows up on complaints and says thank you for good comments, they offer incentives and promotions their customers would appreciate. Hilton talks with their 'fans' rather than 'at' them, they try to provide content that has real value, rather than simply 'pushing marketing messages.' Whereas Marriott acknowledges that they are not giving the 'appropriate level of participation' however this year they do hope to overcome this and build their online profile.

Malmaison believes that their site incorporates engaging and dynamic content for their consumers; Hilton always 'tries to provide information that is valuable to our audience.' Marriott is drawing up plans to address their 'limited' content.

Champions and Time Spent with Social Media Marketing

All three hotels understand the importance of assigning a dedicated social media marketer; Hilton has 'an agency team and three internal team members'; Malmaison has 1 person from each hotel responsible and Marriott has nominated six people for their social media activities.

Marriott only spends a couple of hours per week on social media marketing whilst Malmaison spends 'as much time as we can' which is again vague but sounds keen! Hilton understands that 'time investment is considerable and necessary.'

Attracting the Active and Demanding Online Consumer

Malmaison attracts online consumers to their social media sites through exclusive offers and competitions; Hilton has integrated their Facebook and Twitter with their official brand site and other microsites; they also rely heavily on

word of mouth from their current 'fans' and use giveaways. In the near future Marriott will be adding their social media addresses to their traditional 'collateral' that they hand to clients.

Malmaison agrees with the statement that 'online consumers are more active, participative, resistant and demanding.' Hilton thinks it varies; 'most followers are honest and enjoy travel so their posts and comments are positive' but Hiltons social media channels are 'not intended to be a guest assistance centre.' Which I disagree with; guests should be able to have their problems resolved through social media, I do understand that it's an international company but strategies should be in place for these encounters. Marriott said 'we will only really begin to see this in the coming months as our exposure grows.'

Analysis of Social Media Marketing

Malmaison analyses their social media marketing at the end of every week using tools such as 'trendistic, tweetbeep, twittercounter, twitpwr.' Hilton receives weekly reports from an agency that 'tracks major topics.' However Marriott's focus is 'bringing our profile to a level where it actually merits tracking.'

TripAdvisor Reviews

Malmaison and Marriott both stated that they use TripAdvisor reviews but didn't say how they used them. Hilton encourages its hotels to monitor consumer reviews as 'they are a great way to understand what is and is not working for a particular property.'

Negative Comments

If Malmaison finds a negative comment then they 'address and investigate the situation, if a contact number/email address is left then the matter will be dealt with in private.' Hilton does their best to resolve the issue; 'just as we do at our hotels when a guest complains.' Until this year Marriott only acted on feedback without replying to the customer; but now they use the 'Management Response' function to post replies to both negative and positive comments.

Hilton doesn't believe social media can necessarily go wrong, but negative posts about customer's experiences at their hotels is 'disheartening.' Malmaison stated that they seem to be doing ok and Marriott said 'this remains to be seen.'

Social Media Working Well

All three hotels have had positive experiences with social media; Malmaison has had positive feedback from its 'fans', the events they advertised have had favourable responses and offers have been well received. Hilton asked 'Tweeters' to cheer for the film premier 'Up in the Air' for a chance to win various prizes; this was mutually beneficial and increased the hotel's profile; reporters often post stories from Hiltons Twitter or Facebook. Marriott use Facebook to advertise charity events and to drive exposure of their Christmas party packages.

Recommendations

Malmaison and Marriott are welcoming of recommendations ‘that are tailored for our product and the market we are in.’ Hilton are ‘always looking for suggestions that we can use at the brand level and share with our hotels.’ Social media is a continual process of evolving and updating that takes time and commitment, even though Hilton are the most advanced in social media, the willingness for suggestions shows true commitment and is an important attribute.

Hilton are the most savvy in social media marketing; Marriott is fairly new in this concept and need more time to extend their strategies. Malmaison is well developed but not up to Hiltons standards however Hilton is a multi-national company which is hard to compete with.

Unfortunately some managers did not answer in as much depth as I would have liked; none would disclose any financial information which is understandable but disappointing as it would have been interesting to compare the financial implications and set a guideline amount in the recommendations. One manager took 3 months to fill out the questionnaire and only replied when I used Facebook to prompt them to fill it in.

5.3 PollDaddy Results

Polls were developed on PollDaddy to ask the general public their opinions on social media marketing. Originally I had problems with the response rate as I only had a free account, if I had a paid account I would have received more responses and more exposure, but I overcame this by using Facebook to link my questions from PollDaddy and the responses increased rapidly; reinforcing the argument that social media is effective.

Table 3; Key Points from PollDaddy

1.	87% think that social media marketing isn't just a trend.
2.	50% think that marketers abuse social media marketing.
3.	48% think there should be rules for the appropriate usage of social media marketing.
4.	31% think marketing on social media is innovative.
5.	60% find it easier to challenge marketer's claims through social media marketing.
6.	30% use Facebook and 27% use Twitter as their main social media forms.
7.	36% think companies on social media are demonstrating meaningful participation, authenticity and real engagement.
8.	62% engage in social media if they see it as beneficial.

9.	57% think social media marketing is a convenient and efficient way of finding information and interacting with an organisation

Source; Author's Analysis of Poll Daddy Results

1. This is a significant percentage of people who think social media marketing isn't just a trend; they believe it will be around permanently so hotels should take up this information and use this to their advantage through marketing.

2. Half who answered thought that marketers 'just don't get' social media marketing; people felt that marketers could make more of the opportunities they have; the 'recommendations' may help marketers use social media marketing more effectively.

3. This point reinforces the need for marketers to effectively use social media marketing; it is a fairly new concept and marketers need to develop their strategies if they want to succeed.

4. 31% think marketing on social media is innovative which is encouraging for marketers; 32% of people don't mind social media marketing as long as it isn't excessive.

5. Online consumer aren't afraid to challenge marketers claims; they are more assertive which strengthens Chen et al (2009) and Kozinets (1999) argument that the balance of power has shifted away from the marketer to the online consumer.

6. Most people who answered used some form of social media marketing, from Facebook to LinkedIn; companies should begin marketing on Facebook and then develop their strategies from there.

7. 36% thought that social media marketing shows companies commitment to engagement and interaction; however the polls were very close with some people being suspicious of social media marketing and the marketing ploys.

8. Social media sites are all about customer engagement with beneficial content this point reinforces Mclean (2007) and Tikkanen et al (2009); companies who focus on engagement rather than selling will see success.

9. This supports TIG Global's (2009) point that social media users will likely be appreciative of hotel marketers updates and more inclined to pass them along to their networks of friends and family, if they feel the updates are authentic and useful.

All questions answered had different response rates ranging from 97 to 497. Even though some of the percentages are fairly inconclusive, social media

marketing is a growing trend and it would be interesting to see the results in a year's time.

5.4 Recommendations

The dynamic growth and popularity of social media sites has created new opportunities for hotels; I have created recommendations to ensure proper usage of social media marketing and eliminate the risks involved for hotels.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to evaluate social media in hotel marketing; this project aims to help hotel marketers assess the key activities involved in social media marketing and evaluate the impact on a hotels marketing strategies and their image.

Literature Review

The internet has forced companies to transform themselves to be more interactive, innovative and efficient as the online consumer is more active, demanding and in control; if unhappy about a service the hotel's reputation can be damaged as negative online information posted is instant and public; sharing their opinion with hundreds of thousands of potential customers. The more online consumers communicate with one another, the bolder they feel about challenging marketers and marketing claims. Social media marketing requires participation, interaction and dedication; time, commitment and resources are essential for the efficient use of social media marketing; it is a highly engaging and innovative marketing method.

Engaging and dynamic content can enhance a hotels presence and generate continuous interest; it needs to be focused on the consumer, it's not what the hotel wants to talk about it's about what the consumers want to talk about. If a hotel enhances its social media presence, it can create a buzz around the property and contribute to increased awareness and booking considerations. Savvy marketers are increasingly using social media to let guests sell their hotels, which is authentic marketing at its best.

Findings

By analysing the impact of social media marketing through different mediums the research was able to demonstrate the impact of social media marketing. More time was needed to analyse the Facebook campaign and a payable account was needed on PollDaddy to increase the exposure of the polls.

Despite the limitations there are a number of important points that came from the research; more consumers are accepting companies presence on social media sites like Facebook however consumers prefer personal status updates; not

sales pitch statuses. The company profile needs a personality in order for engagement to be fulfilled.

Social media is a continual process of evolving, updating and developing; hotels should be consistent in regularly usage on social media sites; instant information is needed to be given; a week is far too long to interact and deliver their message effectively. Hotels should implement weekly analysis of their social media marketing strategies to ensure effective usage. All three marketing managers have positive experiences with social media marketing with Hilton stating 'social media marketing can't necessarily go wrong.'

PollDaddy consumers don't mind social media marketing as long as it isn't excessive; it shows companies commitment to engagement and interaction; however the polls found some people being suspicious of social media marketing and the marketing ploys. Consumers thought that marketers 'just don't get' social media marketing; they felt that marketers could make more of the opportunities they have; the 'recommendations' may help marketers use social media marketing more effectively.

Recommendations have been derived through secondary research for the effective use of social media marketing. A dedicated and committed employee needs designating to monitor and interact on the social media sites. Marketers should establish themselves as credible members of the community and legitimate experts in their field by sharing knowledge and useful links.

To Conclude

Social media marketing is a fairly new trend; marketers should intensify their efforts to develop and expand their social media marketing strategies to improve their online positioning. There are positives and negatives to any new venture but overall if social media is effectively used the positives out weight the negatives. It is virtually impossible to compete in today's marketplace without a solid internet strategy and hotels need to merge social media marketing into their brand and their marketing plan. Social media will soon be the norm in marketing and marketers need to implement dedication, time and resources to be successful and stay ahead of their competitors; most hotels lack the resources required to effectively implement social marketing strategies so this paper should significantly impact how hotels market on social media sites.

Social media marketing is a free marketing tool and if used effectively can be beneficial to the hotel with high returns, however if hotels use social media but not effectively then this can be detrimental to their image; online consumers will perceive them as a nuisance and their online reputation will be ruined. Referring back to the questions asked at the start of this paper; 'is it detrimental for a hotel not to use social media sites?' and 'can it be detrimental if social media sites are used but not appropriately?' I think it can be both detrimental to a hotel to not use social media, as they are missing out on a mass online market, who will be

discussing their brand whether they are participating or not, however it can also be detrimental if social media is used but not appropriately. By incorporating value, interactivity and engagement; hotel marketers could thrive with social media marketing.

Future research from this paper should look into the long term benefits of social media marketing. Some of the percentages were inconclusive from PolDaddy, it would be interesting to see the results in a year's time to discover how opinions had changed.

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