

## **1. Socially yours:**

Introducing me - if you want to pay a blogger - I am pen for hire, backed up by 8 bloody good programmers.

## **2. The Blogger versus Social Media**

This is a really hard topic to discuss - in fact I think I have been handed the hospital pass here. I don't think you can't necessarily take the stance of blogging or social media - blogging is social media. Further I think the jury is still somewhat out on social media value. Twitter for example, or is there really any value in Facebook? What can not be denied is that social computing is not a fad. Nor is it something that will pass you or your company by. Gradually social computing will impact almost every role, at every company, in all parts of the world.

I have read every bloody thing published on the Internet about marketing on social media - I have been involved in a number of high profile "campaigns" - I have been to conferences, masterclasses and on and on - but there is one potential problem with tourism and social media marketing: immediacy and proximity!

Social media provides an exceptional opportunity because of the speed with which news travels the Internet. Say something today and it is everywhere - offer a stunning deal and it will travel fast. But yesterdays news is so last year.

It is a primary difference between blogging and the social networking you all want to hear about. Blogging is a slow build - you need to build up your perceived value as an expert in your area - whether that be as the sailing operation in the Whitsundays, the inbound travel agency in Australia or the dominant hostel in Darwin. To achieve this within the blogosphere alone could take ages. Twitter, Facebook, Friend Feed provide immediate opportunities to send your message.

And therein lies the problem - tourism is not exactly full of exciting new content. You all run products (tours etc) they are the same product every trip - consistency is the key to running a good tourism product, which makes it very hard to come up with something unique to say. We ran a rafting trip today - it was good, same as last week. Likewise, with deals - people need to be close to your product to avail of the deal.

There is another problem - social media necessitates change management - it involves your customer having a say in the product and the marketing. In tourism running the same product every week means that this is not necessarily possible. But with this in mind if anyone is tweeting during this presentation - then tweet me a question and I will change course and deal with your question - there is a challenge.

In contrast to Nigels presentation though I think social media is an easier route than straight blogging. There are just so many bloggers these days that getting attention is difficult. You end up working harder in social media marketing on your blog than you do on your own site. I do agree with Nigel that one route to success is to enlist the help of already successful bloggers. In contrast, however, establishing yourself as an expert in your area within social media can be achieved much quicker.

Blogging (and lets throw newsletters in there) are all about creating a smoke and mirrors image about yourself or your company. The only real measurable are page views and

subscribers. Social media on the other hand has real immediacy and measurability. For example on Twitter it is the number of followers and number of retweets.

If you are not spending on social media marketing you need to be - because everyone else is starting to!

### **3. So what is social media**

Firstly I think the main definition that most actually think of is social networking which covers such sites as Facebook and Twitter. But social media actually covers a much wider spectrum of technologies such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, forums and reviews and ratings. Social networking is really just a subset of social media. How about: social media is an engagement with online communities to generate exposure, opportunity and sales.

More useful than asking is social media a fad or much of this is hype is to look at the fundamentals that are behind the phenomenal growth of social media. The big thing that has changed is the ability of almost anyone to produce and distribute content. To me this is the linchpin aspect of social media and social media marketing.

### **4. Apathy and abuse!**

But you already know that - which leads me to the questions of why the fuck I am here. I am amazed by how apathetic this industry is to the Internet and I am equally amazed at how far behind we are in relation to US and even a lot of European companies with regard to selling our tourism products online. I stood up here (in Byron Bay) 2 years ago and gave you all sorts of tips on search engine optimisation and in many cases it was the leading edge of the social media frontier. The reviews were great thanks! But unfortunately, I really have not seen many of you do very much of what I said. For example here are two leading social network content communities: You Tube and Flickr. How many people are actually active within these social networks. That is, how many businesses upload content, friend other users with content about their businesses, favourite that content, promote that content through comments etc, in the case of Flickr actually tag all the photos with your business names and geo-locations.

Did you know that social media such as Flickr and You Tube links are now weighted much higher in search engine algorithms than business to business site links. Did you know that your Twitter page has a very high page rank and that the link to your website in this profile is counted by Google very highly. That alone is reason enough to be building up your Twitter page. In terms of apathy I gave you a great opportunity recently to get your content onto Twitter as a test. During the Queensland rains and Victoria bushfires we offered to tweet any updated about road conditions products that were still operating and so on. Greyhound jumped on the chance - and thanks guys. Raging Thunder sent us some great stuff - saying the river is high, we are open and the rafting is great or something like that - and as a result we generated lots of click traffic for them!

Unfortunately for the majority of you in here you are being turned in marketing dinosaurs by social media - and the sooner you realise this and realise the opportunities the greater potential your business will have in the online space. How much time should you spend on social media marketing - we budget on (and surveys of other marketers confirm this) that around 10 to 20 hours per business.

### **5. But you have to think outside the box - this is not traditional marketing**

Did you know that Tower Bridge is on Twitter - how cool would a tweeting Oz Experience bus be. "I have just arrived in Byron Bay" How about these folks - botanicalls. The one on the left changes the face when it needs feeding, the one on the right will even Tweet you when it is hungry. I heard of one guy who has engineered his girlfriends pot-plant not only Tweet her - but if she ignores it it will contact all her friends on Twitter and Facebook to tell them she is neglecting it.

## **6.. Which nicely brings us to Twitter.**

I think there is something really important you need to know before you rush into Twitter and I think that is Twitter speak. You have to get the etiquette down pat.

It is right to say "I am on Twitter", you can also use the verb - are you "Twittering that" - but it is obviously more correct to conjugate the verb and say " I tweeted. But you never saw "I am twatting now" Unless of course you are drinking - in which case you are Twatted.

## **7. But seriously what are the first steps in getting into social media**

Firstly social media is an exercise in change management. Success in social media does not happen overnight. It needs everyone within the business including senior management to be involved. I think you should avoid appointing someone solely as your social media manager - the burden of the efforts should be collective and no one person within an organisation should own social media.

It is a shift in the way your marketing message is delivered from a top down delivered message to a consumer focussed pull model. That is, I believe that the best course of action for tourism companies is to actually sit back and listen to what your customers are saying and add value to the conversation where it is appropriate. For tourism companies i don't believe it is about followers or numbers of friends - I believe it is about the conversation that is taking place outside of your business and I believe that a social media marketers should be aggregating that conversation and trying to own your brand.

I think you should be active in forums, posting on peoples blogs, getting involved in Twitter when you can answer someones questions and so on. A place to start that I would recommend is the social search site called whostalkin. A second place is to set up Tweet Deck and monitor a stream of searches around you company name and see what people are saying. One good example is a company promoting Queenstown New Zealand. They don't really send out marketing messages, instead they monitor the Twitter stream and whenever someones says something good about Queenstown - I just did a canyon swing it rocked - they simply re-post it on Twitter and their Facebook pages.

The second big change is to lose the corporate identity. Social media necessitates a very real personal approach. This means no avatars of sunny beaches or sailing boats - but actual real persons faces. Consumers will respond much more readily to social media messaging if there is a real name and real face to the communications. In most cases this is will mean that you will have to let go of control of your marketing message to your actual staff within your business. It also means you are going to have that horrible internal debate with yourself over the productivity of staff because they are Tweeting and Facebooking during work hours. The secret to success is to shape the conversations they are having and ask that it be business focussed.

But you need to take a long term view of social media - and obviously long term in the Internet does not mean too long. But you need to drop the focus on campaigns and think

about establishing relationships with your customers. This also means getting away from the Facebook page that looks like a series of press releases. It is not about interruptions but about collaborations.

One of the hardest things about social media marketing is the lack of transparent return on investment markers. At the Travelution Summit in London last week Marc Charron from Trip Advisor explained that their Facebook app was hugely successful with over 10 million users - but that it had failed to convert to product sales and tripadvisor.com users and in this way was an ROI failure. Social media first and foremost has to be considered an exercise in brand building. But on the flip side you are missing out if you are not all over social media. Google stats reports that an average holiday booking online takes 29 days of research from 12 separate searches with the user on average visiting 22 different travel websites. Of course this is not necessarily appropriate statistics for our industry but it certainly illustrates a case in point.

Avenue Razorfish shows that a user is 7.5 times more likely to click on search result if they have been exposed to the brand via display and banner advertising twice before. You put your posters and brochures up all over the hostels but you don't run cheap banner ads throughout the websites your customers are going to.

## **8. Think outside the box**

As I said before there is just so much more to social media than just straight marketing and I really urge you to think outside the box when it comes to your next marketing strategy. Well actually I urge you come to me to build a unique strategy for you. Let me show you something here that is completely different. This is a development for AJ Hackett Bungy in New Zealand. It was realised there that with modern technology travellers are capable of taking photos and videos of their jumps often better than the professional AV operators. Using their phones alone while jumping they were getting fabulous footage. Simultaneously they are uploading this content to their Facebook pages, You Tube and Flickr and thus there is sort of a complete lose of brand control or brand interaction with the Bungy NZ brand. But when we started to do some strategy work we discovered that in fact when a person jumped there is actually about 10 minutes of video footage that ends up on the cutting room floor and likewise about 10 photos - only 3 of which are sold. So, we developed this website where the customers could go afterwards to access all their media. We then took that a step further and understanding that the best marketing for Bungy (and tourism product for that matter) is actually the customers themselves we developed tools for the customers to mash-up their content into new slideshows, photo albums etc which we then gave them simple tools to export to Facebook, Flickr, You Tube, Jump Cut and even the Roxio photostory API which puts their music on the whole personal piece. We added in ever changing motivational promotional material as well so as users could build little little story intros and outros to their whole Bungy experience. To make it even simpler users can log on using their Facebook username and password and share their "canvas" as we call it with their Facebook friends who have also signed up.

In this case we really are using social media to market the product without ramming a message down anyones throat - we are letting the customers do the marketing for us. We are simply giving them the tools, making it easy for them. The ability to combine one or more pieces of web content is one of the phenomenon of social media. This is possible because of the openness of social media - website developers these days expect users to mess with their content in new ways. If you are trying to control your content, control your Facebook page, copyright your images you will not win in the social age.

For those of you who have had the misfortune of being holed up in a corner of a bar by me after one too many drinks will know that I believe that the future of the Internet is not necessarily in your website but in the value of your content. I believe that the distribution of your data is more important than trying to get as many people to your website as possible. We are seeing this shift in the Internet taking on more and more importance all the time. Firstly, you have affiliate programmes such as Hostel World where so much of their bookings come through third party websites - in this way their asset is not their website it is the availability database they have built up. Trip Advisor has just announced that it is syndicating its reviews and ratings. The impact of this could be huge on our industry - sites that did not have reviews and ratings before may soon have lots of content which exposes us to great risks (and returns).

What sort of tools might you use in your business - well at the minimum and something to take away is to consider what content you have that you could make easily shared by your customers. Initially, the most obvious one is your booking confirmation. Do you have fields in your booking confirmation to put in the names of friends and family to be advised where they are staying or what they are doing. How about a save to Facebook option - little message saying Dan Roberts has booked an Adventure Tours Litchfield National Park day-trip sent to my Facebook and Twitter account on booking. Two other sites to consider is TripIt - where a user emails their confirmation to the website and it turns it into an itinerary for them (it is awesome) and Travel Generation.

And for those that don't know already Travel Generation is my very own social travel network project. It has been in development for a long time. We launched last year in October as a travel blog using paid travel writers to provide us content. In February we were voted by Lonely Planet as one of the Top 5 Group Authored Travel Blogs in the World (so that is after basically 4 months). Unfortunately in the public voting we were knocked back to second by Spotted BY Locals - which is a very established blog, however, we did beat the very large Matador Group. And as I said we are a pen for hire!

But Travel Generation is not purely a travel blog. Rather Travel Generation is a unique trip planning social networking website. We have developed some very new technology based on what we call social bookmarking. I believe that one of the biggest problems within tourism booking and planning websites is that they are only as good as their database of products. If you want to plan an itinerary online such that say stays two nights at the Hilton, one night a backpackers, do an adventure activity and go to a musical you would have to use a number of different websites. No single website would have all this content. Using Travel Generation a user traverses the Internet going to as many different websites as they like and through what we call a bookmarklet (which they drag into the browser toolbar) they can save any webpage content to their own Travel Generation trip planning space. When they click on "save to TG" we spider the site grabbing all the details about the product, its geo-location, images and so on and save this for the user. Then within their own account they can build up a schedule of their complete trip covering absolutely anything they want. They can bookmark photos of destinations, wiki and travel guide content, hotel and airline booking confirmations and so on.

We then of course integrate completely with Facebook for exporting your itinerary to there, you can log on with your Facebook or Open ID and maintain your friends within TG (or vice versa), we integrate with iCal, Outlook and iPhones for pushing your itinerary, we in-

tegrate with Blogs using Wordpress, Blogger and Movable Type APIs - or of course we have our own blogging platform for those that want to maintain a blog against their plans.

The key thing here is that the bookmarking technology is very flash and we are building a social media site without data. In the future if we are successful we will be able to tell a lot of demographic information about travellers - where are they all going based on bookmarking and scheduling etc. The site does not do bookings!!

How could you get involved? Well as I said make it easy for you customers to save your content to Facebook, Tript, Stumble Upon is another one and TG - put a button on your website to save to TG (I can provide you with the code). Or if you are really keen we are actually looking for partners at the moment to develop our trip planning technology into their websites via APIs. That is, you could have the ability for your users to build up travel plans using your content and thus put your booking engines on it. TG itself is still in private beta - the branding you see here is how it will look in the next few days - it was supposed to go live last week but with me travelling we have held off because I have not finished the blog branding. The first release of private beta will have quite a bit of the functionality turned off such as the travel stream (which I can explain over a beer later to anyone interested). We plan to release this sort of over the next six months also giving out more and more beta passes as we go - I am happy to give anyone one of these also now. We are also just undertaking now a small funding round to be able to give it the next big push on the marketing front.

## **9. Summary**

I don't think anyone in our industry is yet doing social media marketing well. I think the first decent sized complete social media strategy will clean up. We at Xebidy have done lots of little things successfully. So far of all the companies I have worked with no one has been prepared to commit spend or time to tackling social media.

The key to any social media strategy will be putting aside the fear of failure. It has been shown time and time again that failing forward is the best way to get ahead in social media (TQ and the Tattoo is one example). But the things that I can guarantee in social media that will happen include:

- Higher search engine rankings for top keywords
- More rankings of additional keywords for "long-tail" keyword phrases
- More link popularity for sites linking on their own accord
- More link popularity from social media sites
- Direct traffic from incoming links from social media websites (one good StumbleUpon submission can net thousands of visitors alone)
- Significant traffic increases and steady growth in unique visitors month on month

## **10. The Future**

**Mobile - we have invested heavily at Xebidy focussing on developing client sites or making websites mobile friendly**

**Data portability**

**Friend Feed**

**Flutter video**