

Hoteliers Need to Consider the Impact of Social Media

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There are some false assumptions by some hoteliers and hospitality consultants that managing a hotel's online reputation is as simple as monitoring Trip Advisor.

That is sort of like saying I have all of today's news that I need because I watch CNN. CNN would like you to think so, but there are different perspectives and information sources for the news as there are for travel chatter.

In a recent trade article, it was suggested that all a hotel needs to do to manage their online reputation is to monitor Trip Advisor and purchase advertising on social media websites. In my opinion, this is way too short sighted! This approach limits the true commercial benefits of social media to those hotels and brands that can afford advertising and there is the question of the value of advertising where people are going for social comments and non-commercial information. The shoppers who go to social media websites and blogs are seeking unbiased reviews and chatter to help them make their buying decision. The buyer's path will normally go from there to the search engines and on to the hotel, brand or 3rd party websites for additional information and to conclude their reservation.

There are millions of social media websites and blogs, and this number is increasing. Certainly not all of these sites or blogs specialize in hotel or travel reviews, but they present social discussions and postings about hotel experiences by all types of travelers, business, family, groups and vacationers. How often a particular hotel will generate consumer chatter is dependent on a number of factors for example, the size of the hotel and its various services.

The source of the online chatter depends on a variety of factors, for example what percent of your guests are International visitors compared to local or national? What are the average ages, sex and nationalities of your guests? What percent of your guests are leisure compared to business? Each of these factors represents different cultural elements and the social media websites and blogs are designed to appeal to cultural and social interests of which may or may not include chatter about travel experiences and preferences. It is a mistake to think there is no chatter about travel experiences on MySpace, YouTube, Hotel Chatter, FaceBook, Expedia and thousands of other websites and blogs whether they target travel or not.

The growth and impact of social media on travel and hospitality cannot be ignored or simplified. It requires monitoring, response or interaction by the hotel and a means of monitoring your online reputation. For the average hotel or hotel company, it is far too time consuming and abstract to think Yahoo or Technorati data can be sorted analyzed and measured to tell just how your business is viewed in the social media world and what is your online reputation.

A recent statement by Jonathan Tisch, Chairman of Loews Hotels, during his keynote address at the 2007 HITEC conference put social media into perspective. Mr. Tisch commented, 'We are using technology to break through the clutter and noise and reconnect with the customer.' Mr. Tisch was referring to using technology to build brand loyalty by learning more about their guests and recognizing the consumer wherever they go. And, what better way to know your guests than to join in on their chatter about your hotel and your services, not to mention monitoring what is said about your competition.

As you begin planning your 2008 marketing budget, ask yourself these questions:

How do you manage your online reputation across multiple social media websites and blogs?

How do you offset negative chatter about your hotel?

How can you capitalize on positive social media chatter about your hotel?

How do you measure your social media online reputation?

It is important today that you truly understand the social and community aspects of the Internet equally as much as you do the commercial. Another way to justify the importance of social versus paid advertising is the fact that search engine shoppers respond to organic search listings as much or more than to the paid listings. So we might assume these same shoppers will rely on online chatter from friends, relatives and unsolicited consumer input as much or more than to a paid Internet advertisement.

The simple truth is that the Internet is evolving into a variety of open forums for consumer generated media and this will inevitably grow in its value for the online shoppers. Please do not misunderstand me, I am not diminishing the importance of your search engine rankings, brand web pages and the rich content needed for an effective website. Nor do I believe social media will totally replace the value of online advertising. My point is that it is equally important that you know what your online reputation really is and how you can affect your return business and generate new business by interacting with the social media websites and blogs. To interact you need to know all of the sources of online chatter and you decide which to respond to and how to respond.

You need to seriously consider social media management (SMM) as part of your overall marketing and public relations strategy going forward. Consumer chatter will have as much or more impact on your sales results as any other marketing activities.

About Lodging Interactive

Lodging Interactive is a leading provider of Internet Marketing Services to the travel and lodging industries. The company provides a portfolio of effective Internet Marketing Services to hundreds of hotels, resorts, timeshares and bed and breakfasts worldwide.

The Company also offers effective online tools and services: hotelBLAST.com, a self-service email marketing system, ChatterGuard.com, an online social media monitoring and reputation management system, CommentCards.com, a full-service business-2-consumer comment card service, interactive [Google mapping services](#), [eProposal Rapid RFP Response System](#), an online RFP response tool for Sales Managers, and RFPLink.com, a group RFP lead generation and reporting system.

Lodging Interactive clients include branded properties such as Marriott, Sheraton, Hilton, Radisson, Crowne Plaza Hotels, Doubletree Hotels, Candlewood Suites, Best Western, Wyndham Hotels plus numerous independent properties.

The Company is headquartered in Parsippany, NJ and can be reached at 973-402-4970 or by visiting its website at www.LodgingInteractive.com. Lodging Interactive's [HotelCast2.0](#) can be heard by visiting www.LodgingInteractive.com/podcast.htm.

Lodging Interactive is a proud member of the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA), The California Hotel Association, and a supporter of the Hotel Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIAI). For more information you can also contact Richard Walsh, Vice President of Business Development at rjwalsh@lodginginteractive.com or at 973-402-4970.

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