

## Hospitality Sales & Marketing Directors Urged To Use Social Media To Expand Relationship With Customers

2007-09-12

---

### Panel of Experts Offer Insight to Emerging Trends in Marketing Online

'Social media is not just an online network for 15-year-olds, it can be used by hotels to deepen the brand and expand the relationship with the customer,' said Cindy Estis Green, managing partner of The Estis Group, as she presented the findings of an extensive report on Social Media and its impact on both travel marketing and marketing in general.

'We are now in a conversation economy and the Internet is the social network,' Estis said, adding: 'Two-thirds of your customers traveling are on social media. When was your last conversation with them?'

Working together to focus on emerging topics of importance to travel marketers, the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIAI), under the auspices of the HSMIAI Foundation, and the Travel Industry Association (TIA) have partnered to produce a comprehensive educational report titled: The Travel Marketer's Guide to Social Media and Social Networking.

The findings were presented by Estis at the HSMIAI Hotel Sales Strategy Conference at the Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. on Sept. 4, 2007, and will also be presented at the TIA Marketing Outlook Forum, to be held in Charlotte, NC from Oct. 22 - 25, 2007.

HSMIAI assembled a panel of professionals 'in the trenches' of social media to share secrets and insights for its use as a sales and marketing tool as well as predictions for dynamic future applications. Dr. Suzanne Cook, Senior Vice President, Research for the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), headed up the panel including:

Louise Hurlbut, Vice President Marketing, Groopie

Brian Payea, Trade Relations Manager, Trip Advisor

Tim Peter, Managing Director, Leading Interactive Reservations

Cindy Estis Green, Managing Partner, The Estis Group

'This study underscores the fact that savvy consumers are engaged with the Internet's social media tools and social network sites in ever increasing numbers. Travel marketers should be plugged into the latest ways their customers are gathering and exchanging information,' said Cook.

Some of the topics covered in the report include:

Explanations and definitions of social media and social networking

Highlights of the way social media and networking are used in other industries

How travel companies are using social media and social networking in 2007

How travel companies can use social media and social networking in the future

'There is a tidal wave related to online consumer behavior that has already begun to swell and the change that will engulf the marketing world will be of dramatic proportions,' Estis said, adding: 'It's not just about a new set of media, it's a sea change in consumer behavior. Social media opens the door for this new marketing model and as far as the consumers are concerned, the train has already left the station.'

Estis noted that \$4 out of every \$10 spent online is being spent on travel, and in 2007 there will be \$198 billion dollars spent online.

She also noted that the hospitality, travel and tourism industries have progressed from 1995 when websites were effectively nothing more than electronic brochures. 'In 2001, we began the e-commerce age when booking engines were added, and in 2006 we launched the dawn of customer engagement.'

Marketing used to be just to push the message out to the consumer. Peter said it well: 'It used to be a monologue with online communication, now it's a dialogue.'

Payea said, 'You have to know what's being said about you and monitor it. You have to become involved in that dialogue. But, he cautioned: 'Your time and what you say to answer a complaint and how you interact and reply says a lot about your operation.'

Peter added: 'With consumers you are already exquisitely transparent whether you like it or not. You don't have a choice.' But, he noted: 'The total marketing budgets don't have to be large to be effective in social media.'

Hurlbut added: 'Groups are being formed via social media.' She urged, 'You need the manpower resource behind it to start. Figure out what your goals and objectives are before incorporating specific techniques. Build your social media tactics with your short-term and long-term marketing strategy. There is little cost and risk in trying it.'

Estis said, 'You can't be interruptive in your messages anymore. If you are on a bridal site you can't send sales messages to the brides. You need to listen long and hard to better understand the players and the context of each specific social network before you speak, and sometimes you may realize it is not appropriate to speak at all.'

Everyone on the panel agreed that the Internet is, in fact, becoming one big social network. Learning the topography of this complex set of networks is the first step for marketers to develop a strategy of customer engagement.

The report will be available for purchase in late September or early October via both HSMIAI and TIA. The report can be pre-ordered at a cost of \$99 for HSMIAI members and \$149 for non-members at [www.hsmaipublications.com](http://www.hsmaipublications.com). Volume discounts are available for pre-production orders of 50 copies or more.

The Strategy Conference was organized by the Hotel Directors of Sales & Marketing (HDOSM) Special Interest Group (SIG) of HSMIAI. Sponsors of the report include: Publishing Partners SECURE-RES and TIG Global. Sponsoring supporters are Open Hospitality and Yahoo. Conference partners include Smith Travel Research and Rudner Law Offices.

## **TIA**

The Travel Industry Association is the national, non-profit organization representing all components of the \$700 billion travel industry. TIA's mission is to promote and facilitate increased travel to and within the United States. TIA is proud to be a partner in travel with American Express. For more information, visit [www.tia.org](http://www.tia.org).

## **HSMIAI Foundation**

HSMIAI is an organization of sales and marketing professionals representing all segments of the hospitality industry. Founded in 1927, HSMIAI is an individual membership organization comprising more than 7,000 members worldwide, with 39 chapters in the Americas Region.

Established in 1983 to serve as the research and educational arm of HSMIAI, the HSMIAI Foundation's mission is to expand and enhance the educational opportunities available to hospitality sales and marketing executives and to increase the amount of in-depth research conducted on behalf of the profession.

For more information, contact Fran Brasseur, Executive Director, HSMIAI Foundation and Executive Vice President, HSMIAI at 703-610-9024, e-mail: [fbrasseur@hsmai.org](mailto:fbrasseur@hsmai.org). For more details on the HSMIAI Foundation contact [www.hsmaifoundation.org](http://www.hsmaifoundation.org).

## **HSMIAI**

HSMIAI is an organization of sales and marketing professionals representing all segments of the hospitality industry. With a strong focus on education, HSMIAI has become the industry champion in identifying and communicating trends in the hospitality industry, and bringing together customers and members at annual events, including HSMIAI's Affordable Meetings(R). Founded in 1927, HSMIAI is an individual membership organization comprising more than 7,000 members worldwide, with 39 chapters in the Americas Region.

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com>

The URL for this story is:

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article29215.html>

© 1998 - 2007 Nevistas and the author.

Brought to you by Hotel News Resource

*Distribute your news on our Network*

See what all the buzz is about at:

[http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/Info-news\\_account\\_info.html](http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/Info-news_account_info.html)