

Social Media Marketing Insight From Youtube, Southwest Airlines Presented At HSMIAI Travel
Internet Marketing Conference
2007-12-12

Leading professionals from a diverse segment of the travel, tourism and hospitality industries attending the recent Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIAI - www.hsmai.org) ninth Travel Internet Marketing Strategy Conference at the Arizona Grand Resort in Phoenix were privy to exclusive information highlighting social media marketing trends as well as expert advice, insight and tips from YouTube, Southwest Airlines, Best Western International and Visit Florida executives.

The one-day conference featured keynote addresses from Andy Tress, regional vice president of sales, YouTube, and Mike Pusateri, chairman, Vantage Strategy Consulting, as well as a session defining social media with moderator Cindy Estis Green of the Estis Group.

In attendance was a broad range of industry professionals from companies including: Accor Hospitality, Best Western International, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, Hilton Hotels Corp., Kimpton Hotels, Loews Ventana Canyon Resort, Luxe Worldwide Hotels, Marriott International, Outrigger Hotels & Resorts, Preferred Hotel Group, Sonesta Collection, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, Swissotel Hotels & Resorts, and Taj Hotels Resorts.

Robert A. Gilbert, CHME, CHA, president & CEO of HSMIAI, opened the conference noting that the world of travel Internet marketing has changed dramatically since HSMIAI's first conference held on the subject in 2003. 'This is such an exciting time in the field of Internet marketing, and the HSMIAI strategy conference is designed to present the latest trends and tactics available to marketers today as well as look at what's on the horizon,' stated Gilbert.

Conference moderator Dr. Bill Carroll, senior lecturer, Cornell University School of Hotel Administration, noted that as part of the change, 'We are now in the midst of the conversation economy, and we are asking how do we connect with the consumers, and how do we put ourselves in the picture.'

New capabilities that foster direct interaction with customers as part of the growing trend in social networking was the focus of a discussion by Cindy Estis Green of the Estis Group, when she moderated the first session of the day titled The New World of Social Networking. During the session, she defined social networks as 'a website or set of sites that provide a virtual community for people to socialize and/or to gather/share information on a particular subject.'

In researching the new trend for her report The Travel Marketer's Guide to Social Media and Social Networks, Estis noted, 'We are on the cusp of a change in marketing, not because the tool kit has changed, but consumer behavior has changed - we need to alter the way we think about marketing.' The report was released, in its entirety, for the first time during the conference. Details and ordering information for the report are available at www.hsmaipublications.com.

Estis added that social media is not just another form of media and that the control has shifted to the consumers. Brand marketers have been left out of the conversation as consumers just want to talk to each other. The new challenge facing travel marketers is to figure out how to actively engage themselves in these conversations, when appropriate.

Estis was joined by three industry professionals: Jill Howard-Allen, online marketing manager, Southwest Airlines, Leon Corbett, advertising & direct marketing manager, Visit Florida, and Patrick Campbell, senior manager, eCommerce, Best Western International, who further discussed these new social media marketing applications.

Discussing Southwest's philosophy, Howard-Allen said, 'Having the interactions with our customers has always been a desire for us and now there is an opportunity for the consumer to come to us.' Using Southwest's group and their profile on Facebook as an example, Howard-Allen added, 'It is a great dialogue with the opportunity for employees to talk to customers and customers to talk with other customers.'

Corbett, in detailing the process Visit Florida has taken in developing a new interactive website, said they were guided by five principals:

Provide unique perspectives

Give power to the people

Redefine what content is

Create a folksonomy

Evolve

'We wanted to make sure that we provided a place for real perspectives and diverse opinions, while allowing visitors to have a voice,' Corbett said.

Campbell noted that Best Western's social media efforts, including an online video contest and a desktop 'knock knock' widget, allows them to interact with their current guests and reach out to new customers.

Andy Tress, regional vice president of sales, YouTube, offered the group an update on applications for travel marketers in a keynote presentation titled Taking Web 2.0 to the Next Level where attendees were able to gain insight into the new media landscape through case studies of other industries leveraging the medium in cutting-edge ways.

'It's an exciting time to be part of the video online industry - as you know the media landscape is changing and with it comes a significant number of opportunities for travel marketers to use their own content to reach their marketing objectives. They can also engage the community to create content for them and associate themselves with user-generated content,' Tress said.

Mike Pusateri, chairman, Vantage Strategy Consulting, delivered a keynote address on Online Branding - Emerging Strategies in Search Intelligence focusing on navigating the transition from offline to online marketing and why finding the balance between the two is a challenging task today. This session addressed how travel marketers successfully bridge the gap between the two approaches and leverage the massive amount of search intelligence that exists today into practical and profitable strategies.

Pusateri noted that 'More people come to travel sites from search engines than in other industries, so search engine marketing is more important for the travel category.' He ended with the belief that 'your search demand is your intellectual capital.'

In addition to insightful presentations, attendees enjoyed a networking lunch and roundtable discussions on topics such as destination marketing, mapping and local marketing, rich media, mobile marketing, and trademarks and search marketing.

One of the most highly praised and best attended conferences on the annual calendar, the Travel Internet Marketing Strategy Conference addresses the topics of search marketing, blogs, legal issues, metrics, future trends and much more. The forum is ideal for any travel and hospitality professional in a position dedicated to Internet marketing, or for those who want to learn more about the evolving medium. HSMAI's 10th Travel Internet Marketing Strategy Conference will be held April 8, 2008 in Chicago in conjunction with TIA TravelCom.

Conference partners were American Express, Google, iPerceptions, Open Hospitality, TIG Global, TravelCLICK, Travelscream, Vizergy and Worktopia. For future partnership information, contact Robert Gilbert, HSMAI's CEO, at (703) 610-9024 or bgilbert@hsmmai.org.

HSMAI

HSMAI is an organization of sales and marketing professionals representing all segments of the hospitality industry. With a strong focus on education, HSMAI has become the industry champion in identifying and communicating trends in the hospitality industry, and bringing together customers and members at annual events, including HSMAI's Affordable Meetings(R). Founded in 1927, HSMAI 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

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