

Should Your UGC Strategy be About Customer Acquisition or Retention?

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In a recent interview with EyeforTravel John Lee, VP Brand Marketing and Communications, Embassy Suites, explained the fundamental differences between a UGC retention and acquisition strategy.

With so many hotels launching UGC and social networking initiatives, defining a key objective from the start is crucial to success. Do you plan to reach out and attract customers who wouldn't otherwise find you? Or do you want to build a platform for your loyal customers to express themselves and increase brand loyalty?

'I believe you should 'talk' and establish an 'exchange' to each segment differently' said John Lee 'To me, too many attempts to create a dialogue with consumers is too generic, too broad in scope. If the brand has a goal of retaining its best customers - then the format for that content should revolve around what's most important to that target - points and subject matter that resonates with them - a narrow-cast effort if you will'

Traditionally, retention and acquisition marketing efforts are two separate disciplines, and Lee emphasized that the same must be true of social media marketing. John Lee will be discussing the difference between a UGC retention and acquisition strategy in detail at EyeforTravel's **Social Media Strategies for Travel conference. (5-6 March, San Francisco). For more details: www.eyefortravel.com/ugc**

A customer-driven platform for brand advocates is ideal if you aim is to retain customers. By setting up a dialogue between your customers and your brand it gives them a place to reflect what they like about the brand. 'From a brand perspective you need to provide an organizational framework to manage, facilitate and amplify relevant communications among influential online customers' said Lee.

'On the other hand, a brand's acquisition play is much different - you're trying to attract new customers - so where your dialogue / content originates might be in a different area entirely and most importantly the subject matter is also different and should revolve around general brand differentiators - the general 'stuff' your brand loyalists already now about - so, this effort is more of a broad-cast vs. narrow-cast approach'

By speaking to John Lee it became clear that Embassy Suites are taking an innovative approach to engaging customers in a web 2.0 environment. In November 2006 Embassy Suites launched an unusual campaign by asking their guests to re-design their 'do not disturb signs', demonstrating their desire to engage customers with their product and brand.

More recently Embassy Suites kicked off their online social media strategy by sending an email survey out to 80,000 of their loyal customers and asking them what they liked about the brand. An extremely high response rate of 76% promoted them to create the 'ambassadors' - a group of people who are vocally loyal to the brand. They now have an exclusive website and they are testing 'ambassadors' floors in their property. By monitoring this online community Embassy Suites hopes to gain an insight into stay patterns and activities and shown itself to be a market leader in the travel 2.0 arena. **With innovative marketing tactics and a strong base of brand loyalists, Embassy Suites is perfectly poised to take advantage of the social media phenomenon.**

To find about more about Embassy Suites social media efforts attend EyeforTravel's Social Media Strategies for Travel conference (5-6 March, San Francisco) and hear from speakers such as John Lee, VP Brand Marketing and Communications for Embassy Suites. Visit www.eyefortravel.com/ugc or email helen@eyefortravel.com for more information.

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