

How To Operationalize Your Social Media Strategy

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Since our company launched Chatter Guard, our social media management service almost a year ago, we have worked with hotel management companies, hotel chains, independent hotels and restaurants and clearly the impact of social media on these businesses is a moving target.

A target that demands a constant awareness and management. The main comment we hear from prospective Chatter Guard clients is the inability to relate social media to sales results, obviously to enable a definitive return-on-investment. You cannot track the impact of your online reputation to an individual transaction. But, over a short period of time, depending on the trend of your reviews, you will see the impact in your total sales results. Social media is a critically important element in the decision process for the majority of shoppers. Your value of your online reputation is equally important along with the quality of your website, your search engine marketing and even email campaigns. Its value clearly exceeds that of online or print advertising.

Most hospitality companies, hotels and restaurants we have interviewed are not sure where to allocate funding or resources for the management of this critical aspect of their business. The reason for this is because to effectively manage and reap the benefits of social media a combination of skills and resources are required including public relations, operations, revenue management and marketing.

The goal of public relations is to know your online reputation and to build guest relations. Additionally operations contributes details of the guest experience, revenue management determines the level of investment in time, resources and expense while marketing's goal is to capitalize on this communication opportunity to reinforce your brand value, build guest loyalty and reach consumers during their purchasing process. For a hotel, we specify property loyalty as compared to the brand because Social Media interaction is between the property and the guest.

Simply monitoring one or two social media websites or blogs requires time and resources. It may give you piece of mind, but there is no value or return on your time and resources without a strategic plan as to how this important information will be utilized. To reap the benefits of social media requires a measurable plan and clear expectation. Your strategy should enable you to benefit not only from negative reviews, but also the good reviews as well.

An effective strategy should consider these points:

Your monitoring service should cover more than one or two social media websites or blogs. Depending on your market and clientele demographics, your consumer reviews may appear on non-travel websites and blogs or on social media sites that are popular outside of the U.S.

When monitoring social chatter you need to segment the chatter by attributes. For example for your hotel, the attributes may include rooms, perceived value, dining and housekeeping. A different set of attributes will apply for a restaurant, conference facility, spa services or golf. Segmenting by attribute also makes the process of applying this information internally to improve a service, inform your staff or to write a response so much easier.

You need a scoring method to measure the trend of your reviews by attribute so you can measure or compare trends up or down over time. If all reviews about your business are good you need to know that and you can take advantage of this input by posting or linking the chatter to your website.

It is important for you to post responses to both good and bad reviews on the social media websites that allow response postings and where it is a blog you can generally add your comments. Your response should be brief and address only the specific issue raised in a review. Your comment should not read like an advertisement. Remember, this is a social environment! Consumers are on these sites to see the reviews, one-on-one information not a commercial message. The value of your response is in the participation rather than interruption. Your participation shows your willingness to listen and to be responsive, whereas a commercial message may appear deceptive.

The responses we so often hear when discussing the value of social media is 'I have someone monitoring social media' or 'What good does it do to monitor social media, I can't change it.' The first comment is a step in the right direction, but the question again is what are you monitoring and what do you do with the information? The second response tells us there is a clear misunderstanding of the value or the power of the Internet. Recent consumer research indicates that more than 75% of online shoppers will visit one or more social media websites before making a buying decision. To effectively market your services, there is no better place to be than at the source of the information being used for the buying decision. Research also indicates the shopper's willingness to pay the premium price for a hotel that has a strong social media acceptance.

To win more business or to maintain your current business level, you need to know what past guests and customers are saying about you and you need a method of applying this intelligence to improve your customer relations, in-house services and brand image. It is time to bring your public relations, operations and marketing together to develop a good social media plan along with a good targeted Internet marketing strategy. With this combined effort you will reach more consumers at the right time with the right information and that is what sells your hotel rooms.

About Lodging Interactive

Lodging Interactive is a leading provider of Internet Marketing Services to the hospitality, spa and restaurant industries. The company provides a portfolio of effective Internet Marketing Services to hundreds of hotels, resorts, timeshares, spas and restaurants. Clients included branded hotels from nearly every major brand as well as prestigious, landmark independent hotels.

The Company offers effective online tools and services: ChatterGuard.com, an online social media monitoring and reputation management system, CommentCards.com, a full-service business-2-consumer comment card service, eProposalSystem.com, an online RFP response system hotel Sales Managers, RFPLink.com, a group RFP lead generation and reporting system, HotelDirectBook.com, a consumer hotel portal site and DiningClick.com, Internet Marketing Services for the restaurant industry.

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 contact Richard Walsh, Vice President of Business Development at rjwalsh@lodginginteractive.com or at 877-291-4411. The company's website is located at www.LodgingInteractive.com.

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