



# Marketing

by Hannah Smith, CHA, CHT

## Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube: Social media marketing for your hotel

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Social media marketing is everywhere today, and everyone's talking about it. In the midst of this recession, it seems every lodging company and individual hotel is searching for ways to decrease expenses and cut back on the marketing and advertising dollars that seem to be in short supply. Therefore, maximizing a property's exposure without it costing an arm and a leg is one of the greatest challenges hotels face today.

Social media marketing has become a unique and creative way to advertise and network with other businesses. With all the different websites that are available, it is hard not to get lost on the World Wide Web. A few of the most popular social networking and media marketing sites are: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Flickr. Given that some of these social media networks overlap in membership and content, it can be difficult to determine which ones have the potential to actually increase your business and which ones are just wastes of time.

### An innovative media outlet

Effective social media marketing can drive quality traffic to your hotel's website or generate inquiries to the hotel sales staff, but to realize this the technologically savvy hotel manager must learn how to maximize the results from their invested time with little planning, and determine if business to business marketing through social media sites is right for the hotel. This isn't just for the Gen Xers anymore!

So what is "Social Media Marketing"? Social media marketing is a form of Internet marketing which seeks to achieve branding and marketing communication goals via participation in various online social media networks. "Social Media" is a shorter top-level term that describes the space overall, and covers the activities around social interaction, content, videos, branding, and audio exposure.

The next question is where to start? Sometimes managers are so excited with the technology of the Web that they forget key pieces to success, definition of business goals, the long-term and short-term objectives of their hotel's marketing plan, and the overall process for execution. Social media marketing can help hoteliers increase the activities around these top goals:

- Website traffic and user behavior
- Sales tracking and conversions
- Page views and exposure
- Growing brand awareness
- Creating a positive brand association
- Business development and achieving broader customer reach

### Its scope and reach

How broad is the reach of these sites? Facebook, probably the fastest growing site, was started as an online tool for college students and alumni to keep in touch with their friends. Now, there are more than 200 million active users. Over 100 million users log on to Facebook at least once each day, more than two thirds of Facebook users are outside of college, and the fastest demographic is those 35 years old and older. Individual members can literally advertise for their company by having their own business account, and adding more and more friends to their personal network. Recently, a Director of Sales and Marketing in a regional sales workshop stated that she has started a Facebook account for her hotel and has been able to lock down sales leads from guests across the country!

Additionally, many managers are realizing the potential of these social media networks and are also opening accounts on Twitter and LinkedIn. They both provide viewers with updated information with the “What are you doing now” and “Away status” options where members can update their status with any kind of marketing message! Recent statistics state that there are more than 3 million “tweets” a day! Both of these sites are great for networking within your geographic locale and can provide cutting edge information on what is happening in today’s marketplace.

### **Advertising through online videos**

Another social media site, YouTube, is also being used for much more than just funny home videos. According to Social Media Statistics, YouTube drew 5 billion U.S. online video views in July, 2008, representing a 44 percent share of the online video market. Surprisingly, 75 percent of the total U.S. Internet audience viewed online videos during this same period. Indeed, online videos have gone mainstream in society and many businesses are seeking to capitalize on this craze.

Lodging companies and individual hotels have embraced YouTube as a present-day media outlet to share television advertisements touting corporate stay programs, hotel grand openings, property refurbishments, new bedding and ergonomic furniture, Christmas cards, and even specific instances of excellent service delivery. Many of these videos have been viewed thousands of times. Currently, the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute is asking AH&LA members to submit homemade videos of poor operational practices to be highlighted on YouTube. These videos will assuredly be entertaining and educational. AH&LA also posts their Stars of the Industry Award Winner videos on YouTube.

So, what is it that hoteliers can do to assist their hotel or management company in today’s struggling economy? It’s time to change the way we think, and reach more customers by utilizing all of the social media tools that are available at our fingertips. ✧

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