

TOP 10 DIGITAL MARKETING NEWSLETTERS 2013

S f YouTube
YES, YOUR HOTEL
NEEDS A DIGITAL
MARKETING AGENCY

7 REASONS WHY HOTELS NEED FACEBOOK PRESENCE



Make a strategy and start implementing every single day, hire an agency or hire a few guys in house and have a dedicated focus on the social media road ahead.

Roti kapda aur Wifi

For those who are still sitting on the sidelines, waiting to adopt Digital, no hurry my friends except that the cost of entering the game will only go up the more you delay it.

internet
MOGULS[™]
Born 15 Aug, 2009 | Religion : Digitalism
Moguls Online Pvt. Ltd.

CORPORATE OFFICE

14, Second Floor, Local Shopping Complex, Pushpa Bhavan, Madangir,
New Delhi - 110062 India - 91-880-066-2900 | Email: info@internetmoguls.in

WHAT INSIDE

- Page 1 A Simple Guide to Start your Social Media Campaign
- Page 3 7 Reasons why Hotels need Facebook presence
- Page 5 Still not social? Why tour operators need to take Facebook seriously
- Page 7 Roti, Kapda aur WiFi
- Page 9 Yes, your Hotel needs a Digital Marketing Agency
- Page 11 10 Things Hotels should know before going Digital
- Page 13 Thinking Outside the "Wall" : Step Out, Reach Out, Hang Out!
- Page 15 Increase "Revenues" by Multi-screen optimization
- Page 17 Want to sell more roomnights? Get your phone lines checked!
- Page 19 Increasing Revenue via TripAdvisor Management

EDITOR'S DESK



Avijit Arya
CEO, Internet Moguls

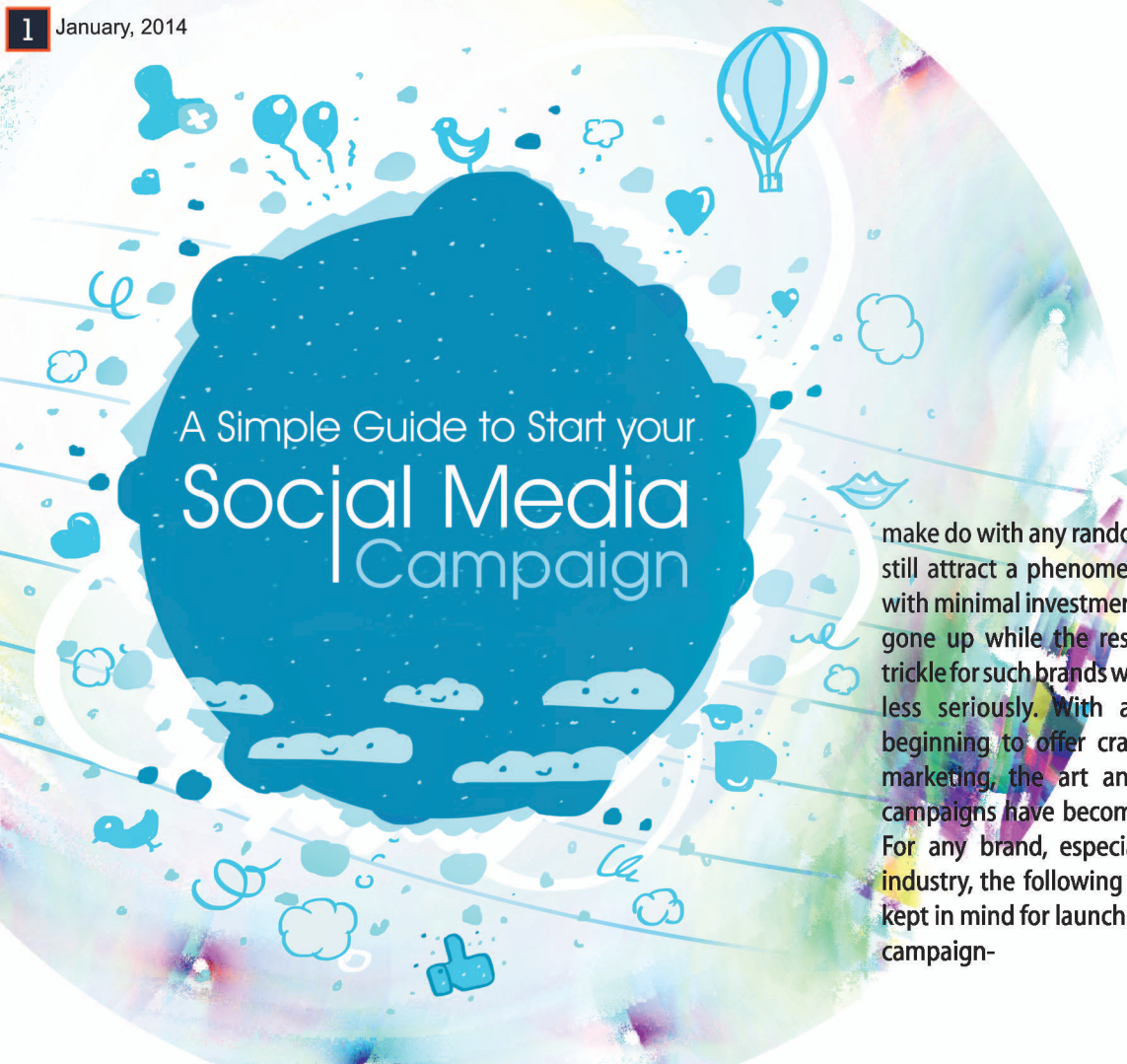
What is this?

21,000 Hospitality professionals have subscribe to my Monday morning digital updates since 2009. Have all the Top 10 Digital Marketing articles to help you find Digital Revenue for your Hotels, Companies & Airlines

Thank You for Reading

Sincerely Yours

Avijit Arya
CEO, Internet Moguls



A Simple Guide to Start your Social Media Campaign

make do with any random social media strategy and still attract a phenomenal traffic to your Fan Page with minimal investment. But with time, the cost has gone up while the results have come down to a trickle for such brands which took social media a little less seriously. With a score of institutes now beginning to offer crash courses in social media marketing, the art and science of social media campaigns have become more complex and tricky. For any brand, especially for the hotel & travel industry, the following are the key elements to be kept in mind for launching a successful social media campaign-

Through this article, I want to touch base on the very basics of social media which I believe should remain constant no matter how the social networks change or modify themselves.

The social media craze which took the world by storm a few years back is showing no signs of fading out. To be honest, the addiction to social networks is still on the rise and is spreading to the farthest corners of the world with engagement levels increasing even in the countries which were first bit by the social media bug. While a lot of businesses were quick to explore the revenue potential from advertizing or promotions on such networks, the competition among brands on channels like Facebook is increasingly becoming fierce. A couple of years ago, you could probably



- **Be present and stay active** – Of course, the first step is to be present on the social networks. Creating a Fan page on Facebook is not as simple as creating an account. The cover image, the display image, About Us section, image galleries, integrated tabs & content updates need to be well thought out and should be engaging while being informative. Once you are on Facebook, be active. Regular updates, even multiple times a day, ensure that new Fans coming the page know the page is not dormant and can be used as a source for regular information about the brand.
- **Integrate:** Social media is not just about Facebook though it is, by far, the most important one. Your social media campaign may center around Facebook but do not neglect other platforms. Sync Facebook with Twitter, integrate Twitter, Flickr, Youtube and Pinterest on Facebook to consolidate your fans from across the platforms onto Facebook.
- **Engage:** Remember, we go to social networks to connect with people we like and things we love. We communicate only with those who communicate back. Keep your fans engaged so they keep returning to your page, acknowledge their appreciation and complaints, let them feel heard. Use of humor, current topics, local news are a

great way to engage fans but sync it with your brand so people do not forget you are, after all, a product to be bought.

- **Inspire & Encourage:** Every word of content and each image should be added to Facebook with the agenda of inspiring fans to take an action. The action could be a "like", a "share", a comment or a click on an embedded link. At the end of it all, the primary objective is to monetize your efforts and hence encourage your fans to check out offers, discounts or deals specially for your fans. This develops a sense of loyalty and increases chances of repeat purchases
- **Explore:** The social media scene is so dynamic that you can not have strategies which require months of time and efforts. Not only the existing functionalities and features may become obsolete, new upgrades may make your campaign redundant. Have shorter timelines for strategies, a quarter long if not shorter. Keep exploring new features like Facebook "Offers" or recently launched Facebook "deals" (only in the U.S). Facebook "Places" is the most underutilized feature, especially by restaurants and bars, which could derive the same benefits as from 4Square with check-in deals, discounts and benefits to diners.

A lot of features on Facebook are fast becoming "paid" while the organic reach is shrinking. The sooner you consolidate a substantial Fan base, the lesser amount you will need to spend on expanding reach of your social media campaigns. Soon enough, brands will need to pay to reach out to a significant amount of audience and hence it is recommended that Facebook Ads, Offers, Sponsored stories become a part of your social media campaign to gather enough experience about paid advertizing on Facebook to launch a full fledged ROI based campaign on this social network at the right time. True, social media marketing is set to become expensive but if anything, at least Facebook is finally becoming a revenue generator. Marketers should rejoice the fact that Facebook is becoming commercial; it makes money if you spend money and hence Facebook is by your side, finally.





**HOTELS
LOVE FACEBOOK**

7 REASONS WHY HOTELS NEED FACEBOOK PRESENCE

Finally, I had a week's break from travelling and decided to spend more time with the Moguls at our office. I will say it is simply amazing to see the energy of the team, especially when we are under the same constant pressure as all Digital Marketing agencies are. Long working hours, BBMs flashing through the evening and the night and a barrage of e-mails waiting for you each morning.

During one of the brainstorming sessions, we ended up listing down the bare elements which Hotels should keep in mind when opting for

social media optimization. It is these basic elements which form the groundwork for any plan or strategy any agency in the world devises to give its clients the maximum benefits of Social media.

The debate of to be or not to be on Facebook is long over and the verdict is in the favor of Facebook. A lot many organizations around the world may still refrain from joining the social media bandwagon for various reasons specific to their own organization, there is a general consensus that Facebook is a vital platform for digital

marketing. As a result, there's a sudden spurt in the new business pages on Facebook and if you have been tracking the changes in Facebook, you will notice that most have to do with the commercial side of Facebook and not inclined towards making general profile users' experience better. Every tweak, ranging from the new Timeline, insertion of sponsored stories, the right hand side column feeds and pages suggestions among others, all are directed towards letting businesses advertise better. The interest of businesses must be quite huge for Facebook to focus so much on

making business pages reach out to more people.

With Facebook on your side, you can expect your marketing dollars give you more leverage and hence it has become all the more attractive for companies to set shop on Facebook. When it comes to hotels, Facebook is all the more relevant because of the nature of hospitality market. If there's any industry which is social, it is the hospitality industry. In effect, Facebook marketing and optimization is just an extension of a hotel's hospitality and the guests expect the same level of service as they may while being at the property.



Here are 7 reasons why each Hotel should have a Facebook presence-

Audience: Irrespective of which segment makes your target group, you can be sure they are on Facebook. Almost every internet user today, at least in the English speaking world, is on Facebook. So, if the audience is here, so should you be.

Timeliness: Any message that you have, from an offer to an announcement or a Press Release, the fastest mode of disseminating information on the internet is via social media. So, you have a last minute offer? Think Facebook.

Frequency: Almost all hotels send out mailers to their past guests but most of the mailers are usually filtered out as Spam. Moreover, world over, e-mail as a mode of information sharing is on a decline except for official usage. Besides, just how many e-mailers can one send out and how to track the actions of the recipients? While on Facebook, you can reach out to your fans anytime of the day, as many number of times and even track how the audience is reacting to the information (likes, shares, comments).

Value for Money: Facebook is perhaps the most economical platform to advertise on. There have been campaigns by marketers where the cost of reaching a person has been below one rupee! There's no other platform which lets you reach out to your target audience at that low cost.

Filtering: While Google lets you filter your audience based on geographical location and keywords searched, Facebook

There are numerous other factors which make Facebook the chosen platform for hotels but it is necessary to at least take the first step of being present on this network. Everything else slowly falls into place and to be honest, the only limitations on Facebook are the limits to your creativity. If you have a creative idea, the platform is already in place for you.



gives you the flexibility of choosing your audience down to the personal interests of people. As Facebook has access to personal profile of the users, your Ads can target the most relevant audience based on their interests and likings and hence your money spent on each click or impression has better chances of giving you ROI

Insights: If nothing else, the ease with which you can manage and control your marketing activities on Facebook should be enough to set shop on this social network. Every single post you make, every single Ad that you run or any special offers that you promote, Facebook gives you instant access to data like number of people reached, how many clicked, how many claimed, where are these people from, which language do they speak! Imagine looking for this data on traditional media campaigns and you will know what!

Virality: This is a bit tricky as it can work both ways. In traditional marketing, you reach a person and your message dies there. Even if a person was influenced by your marketing initiatives, he or she could not spread the message further except through word of mouth. On Facebook, a single "Like" makes your message reach out to additional 150 people who are connected with the person who "Liked" your message. The power of viral further brings down the cost of a marketing campaign. However, a bad news can also spread like a wildfire and hence control measures should always be well thought out.

Still not social?

WHY TOUR OPERATORS

NEED TO TAKE FACEBOOK SERIOUSLY

After a recent meeting with a few leading tour operators in India, I sat back and smiled. It was the year 2010 when I spent considerable time convincing hotels and hotel owners why they should be on Facebook and what are the benefits and by the time year 2012 had ended, almost all new hotels we met were already convinced that social media is a necessity. Somehow, I thought that probably all industries have finally accepted that Facebook is here to stay for good. However, the recent meetings with tour operators almost made me feel nostalgic considering the same set of questions resurfaced which we had to answer almost 3 years back.



Right after the meeting, I decided to sit down and do a little secondary research and what I found was startling. Have a look at the following-

- A survey by TourRadar which covered 1,500 organized tour operators indicates that almost 70% of those surveyed did not have a Facebook page, at least not an active one
- The tour operators were large in size, with a large number of itineraries offered to groups of people between 6 to 50
- All the tour operators surveyed were in the business for more than a year
- None of the operators had more than 1,000 fans
- A few pages had 10 posts made within a short span, followed by a long dormant period

From this, we can easily make out that either the tour operators are ignoring the power of social or are making half hearted attempts to be social. My answer to the operators that we met recently were-

- Most travelers are influenced by their peers' choice of holiday destinations, it is the single biggest source of influence in the contemporary period and is made possible by social networks. Right from the time of planning a travel, during the travel and afterwards, travelers keep posting their experience on sites like Facebook. Imagine one of your customers taking a trip with you and writing about it, day after day. And then relate it with the fact that peers are most influenced by social mentions and rest is easy. Without a Facebook page, how will you find a mention?
- Penetration of social networks, especially Facebook, is fast growing, even in India. When you relate it to the behavior of internet users and the time spent on social platforms, it is vital that your presence in social domain is strong, visible and attractive. As the age old saying in Hindi goes, jo dikhta hai, wo bikta hai.
- Majority of the spare time is spent on social networks by travelers, some spend up to 90% of all their "online" time connecting and socializing on Facebook. Your potential customers are here and they are looking for that one perfect offer which will define their vacation. How will they find you?
- The cost: It is peanuts. I am not saying it because I stand to make business out of it. The amount of money spent per capita on Facebook, when compared to ANY other media, is only a fraction and is almost negligible. In a recent campaign for a 5 Star luxury hotel in Delhi, Internet Moguls calculated the cost of sending the message to a potential client at Rs. 0.03 with more than 3.5 lac people reached. It was quick, it was effective and the cost was a mere fraction of other media campaigns.

A lot can be said about why tour operators should join the bandwagon but I hope the above points will do for now. I am sure that sooner than later the importance of marketing on social media will catch on among travel & tour operators for their own benefit.



Roti | KAPDA AUR WIFI

I missed EyeforTravel's Social Media & Mobile Strategies conference in San Francisco earlier this year but just how much can an entrepreneur travel for conferences and knowledge sharing? After all, we guys have a company to run as well, right?

So, this year, and going forward, I made a deliberate effort to cut down on crazy travel plans while keeping a keener eye on changing trends online and also through the newsletters and stories many of my digital marketing friends from Canada and the US share with me over a few webinars that I attend every month. And so I kept an eye on the analysis of the conversations that transpired during EyeforTravel's Social Media & Mobile Strategies conference. It was only recently that I came across an amazing piece about the conference which talked about most of the very same trends which me and my team forecast at the start of this year.

Considering that the Indian atmosphere is charged with Politics with impending elections, I believe that the slogan for winning elections in India must be changed to Roti, Kapda aur WiFi. Imagine what the power of wifi reaching to the masses in the rural part of India (who can afford small budget hotels and railway tickets, if not air travel) can do for the hospitality industry. Imagine a WiFi covered city, like we were planning to make of Delhi before the Commonwealth Games, and the opportunities would be unbelievably great and may be enough to bring our economy out of its current weak state.

The year 2013 is just about to be over and it is time we started looking at the opportunities that lay ahead in the year 2014. While we are in the process of chalking out monthly and quarterly digital marketing strategies for hotels and travel companies and some airlines, we're this time looking at dividing client budgets / spends based on maximum ROI to be derived from a particular platform. And since all this is so fresh in my mind, I thought in this newsletter, I will talk about the 7 major platforms which, coupled with enhanced access to WiFi, will rule the digital domain when it comes to driving traffic to your website and generation of online sales.

Once again, please remember digital is not the end of all marketing. My experience shows that the best results come when integrated with well executed offline campaigns.



SMART PHONES

With better access to WiFi & 3G services, Indian customers who have hopped on to the smartphones bandwagon are quickly changing the dynamics of online travel purchases. We have always been following the footsteps of the US & Europe when it comes to technology and related trends and a quick look at the US paints a very promising picture for the Indian market. An estimate for the total travel purchases via mobile devices originating from the US alone is over \$25 Billion. That is about 18% of the overall travel market in the US. Keeping in mind that outbound from the US is a major portion of this travel pie, hotels around the world should be careful about how to best profit from this huge \$25 Billion kitty up for grabs. It is assumed that you already have a mobile compatible website and a mobile compatible booking engine. So if your site doesn't work on mobile or can't facilitate online booking, you are very well out of the game. With 47% travelers planning their vacations via phone, and hotels reporting up to 20% of all their bookings coming from mobile devices, it is imperative you start taking mobile compatibility of your website rather seriously.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Saving the best for the last. It is social media which will continue to dominate the online sphere in the year 2014. Facebook primarily for brand awareness and Twitter for a more specific clientele loyal to your brand. It is estimated that close to 25% of leisure trips are "dreamed" while looking at the images of friends' vacation images, a strong presence on social media is bound to impact your online revenues. This "dreaming" of a vacation is bound to increase as more people adopt the practice of sharing images of their travel through their smartphones and tablets. And hence, you

should pursue social media all the more strongly in the coming year.

ONLINE REPUTATION

Over 98% hotels believe that reviews are an important factor for their guests to decide if they want to stay at a particular hotel. The good thing is that hotels are no longer afraid of reviews because as recently as 2012 most hotels thought of review sites as potential hazard to their hard earned reputation. With TripAdvisor's survey indicating that a phenomenal 80% of the reviews contributed by travelers being positive or excellent, the fear of reviews is fast dissolving. Come 2014 and you can expect all the hotels around the world invest in garnering user generated content in the form of reviews on popular websites. With direct correlation between your star rating on review sites with your online revenues, and the fact that the total number of reviews (good or bad) with an official response from the property impacting over 90% of the travelers viewing your profile, there is absolutely no reason why investing in Online Reputation Management be not part of your marketing strategy in 2014.

APPS

Yes, only your loyal guests will download your App on their phones and that it is more apt for hotel chains. But, it has been observed that travelers with an App in their phones / tablets tend to prefer searching through the App rather than the search engine in their phones. If you own the search, and keeping in mind it is your loyal guest who needs to look for a hotel, there are good chances you will not lose the guest to a competitor or an OTA (think commission savings). With WiFi getting more mainstream in India, we should see more of the guests utilizing Apps for their basic needs, including travel purchases. Based on the survey presented in the aforementioned event, it was concluded that 73% of your loyal guests who have downloaded your App will use your App first and will then look other options (search, travel agents etc). Such loyalty has never been witnessed before

even with reward points, mass mailers and other forms of liquidating potential business from loyal customers. Considering the usage of tablets and smartphones if going to go only northward, all hotels should seriously consider investing in mobile Apps or risk losing out on business.

TABLETS



Now was this a surprise! Everyone knew that tablets will soon start playing a major role in shaping how the netizens behave online but even the most optimistic forecasters did not predict that the number of searches originating from tablets will increase by over 180% in 2013. In India, more establishments now offer hotspots for tablet users to get onto the information highway and hence tablet users are now able to contribute more to the surge in searches originating from handhelds and subsequently online purchases. Having said that, the predictions for the increase in searches through tablets for the year 2014 is much more optimistic that what was forecast for 2013 and hence it is anybody's guess just how this market is going to explode. In the year 2013, tablets generated 200% more roomnights for hotels and 430% more revenue to hotels in comparison to mobile devices. Keeping in mind that tablets are still catching up as a popular device to own and the searches through tablets are still way behind what mobile phones generate, this is just phenomenal. 2014 is going to be an exciting year with hotels seeing a major push in their online revenues coming from tablet users. If there ever was a time to optimize your website for tablets, IT IS NOW.



To sum up, in 2014, you will need to do a lot more of what you did in 2013 and expect much better returns. Yes, the competition will become more fierce but that has always been the case. I truly hope that the so called digital divide between the developed and the developing world will be bridged much faster in 2014 and hotels will adopt the same level of technology as some of America's and European top hotel brands utilize today.

For those who are still sitting on the sidelines, waiting to adopt Digital, no hurry my friends except that the cost of entering the game will only go up the more you delay it.

Yes, Your Hotel Needs a DIGITAL MARKETING AGENCY



I would like to touch upon the sensitive topic of hiring a professional agency to manage a hotel's digital marketing. It is given that some eyebrows will be raised considering I represent an agency myself. However, I will let the content speak for itself.

The major concern with digital marketing is our own mindset. We still think that digital market is secondary and is, thus, expendable. Even the hotels which consider digital marketing a little more seriously tend to allocate a minimalistic budget and support their decision by showing the difference in offline and online revenues. What hotels fail to analyze is the ROI comparison in terms of budget allocation and the returns and thus making the comparison biased and inaccurate. If you ask me, I will say that a hotel's primary budget allocation for marketing should go to digital marketing. Why? Because it is more efficient, productive, easy to track, easy to modify and control. Besides, you can reach all your prospective guests via digital medium while offline channels come with a huge premium for limited reach.

There could be digital business opportunity in India for hotels, the economy is slated to grow for at least a few more decades, (the current phase shall pass I feel) the tourists will continue to fly in and the domestic circuit is also expected to become robust with the middle class making an attempt to jump up to the next level. Speaking at almost every hospitality forum worldwide in the last few years, I have been voicing the same opinion: "There was never such an opportunity for hoteliers, anywhere in the world." To be honest, most hotels don't even realize they are losing out on the revenues or are operating at a lower profitability that they can easily achieve as no one understands the potential of online marketing. When you are not sure what your targets should be, how will you calculate and assess the results?

A Revenue Manager, driving 25% of all bookings through the website may seem to be doing a fantastic job. What if their competitor drives 40% of all the bookings through the website? Imagine the savings on huge offline marketing costs, overheads, commissions to agents and OTAs, discounts to Corporate? What if the GMs were told that Facebook can get you last minute roomnights or fill up your restaurant for a weekend brunch from your local city audience? Or a good TripAdvisor rating may give a boost of about 40% to your bookings? No GM, whether at a budget hotel or a luxury property, would want to let go of revenue from digital platforms, especially when the cost of marketing is so low when compared to traditional media.

It is just that the idea of going Digital that needs to be planted a little more strongly in the minds of decision makers as the only way to truly appreciate the power of Digital is to participate in it. Does this scare the management? Well, not exactly. But there is always a fear that digital campaigns are very transparent and reveal success and failure without any

ambiguity. Traditional marketing, on the other hand, is opaque and offers a little satisfaction, wrong it may be, as you can always make them look like a success. Will people ask too many questions if a digital campaign failed? No one wants to jump into unknown waters and be caught off guard but you need to test the waters before you reach the shore again. In digital media, the only losers are those who choose not to participate, those who participate have won just by the virtue of participation.

So, where does this leave a hotel? The GMs & the Revenue Manager, both in their quest to adopt new mediums, eventually hire and fire a few agencies that they expected to do something miraculous. This "something" is usually hard to define as it is usually the agencies which set their own targets and call the shots as they are the "experts". However, not all marketing agencies are experts and it is difficult to find the right ones without burning your fingers a few times. In order to fill the gap, hotels tend to set up a digital marketing team which is a huge cost and hurts because no specific KRAs are defined for the team. The digital marketing team, in turn, becomes dependent on the PR agency hired by the hotel to promote offers, events, discounts and packages when the PR company should ideally be doing just that, PR.

When hoteliers have so many options, which one must they choose and how does this work? Well, a good hotel management company or a hotel marketing company with a proven track record of delivering results may just be the thing you are looking for to start with, at least till you wise up and understand the dynamics of the local market. Add lack of expertise to the equation and you would understand why you should let experts do their jobs while you convert your investment into revenue. A hotelier, new to India or a new site within India, needs to work with a company that understands the market, the region & the competition better than the

hoteliers themselves. More importantly because chances are that the hotelier is a real estate honcho or a "non hotelier" and thus might have limited knowhow of how to optimize revenue through all available channels, especially the digital platforms.

In a nutshell, go for a small digital marketing team or add the KRAs to your existing marketing team to coordinate and control the digital campaigns set up by a professional hotel marketing company. While you will not be totally reliant on the agency, you will still get the best out of your marketing dollars by keeping a tab on what your agency is doing for you. Digital Marketing is not a spectator sport, it is played by both hotels and agencies together. The better the coordination and teamwork better are the results.

I hope this has been able to answer the question of how to do digital and how much, in-house or outsourced or half & half? To recap, do it with professionals and keep a trusted resource to keep an eye on the agency to ensure they are delivering as per brand standards and on time and from the correct channels.





THINGS HOTELS SHOULD KNOW BEFORE GOING DIGITAL

Perhaps, after air travel became affordable and accessible to masses, the only other thing that has significantly impacted hospitality and travel industry is 'digitalization'. Internet, today, has entered our houses, offices & public spaces and you may find a person, without any surprise, carrying devices like a smart phone, a tablet, a laptop and a camera, all capable of taking you on to the information highway. Each of us is connected to the virtual world almost all the time and we have come to be dependent on the web for most of our needs, including travel planning, booking and sharing of experiences post the vacations or holidays.

The following 10 things hotels should keep in mind before taking the leap-

WEBSITE:

It is not enough to look pretty and neat. The website should have functional value and the user interface should be easy and smooth. If your website puts a user off, no matter how apt your hotel is for the travelers, the chances of a booking are minimal.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

If you have the above point all sorted out, the next challenge is to become "visible". Analyze your target audience and optimize the website for search engines

SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING:

For short term objectives like a promotional offer or short term discounts, ensure there is section in the website which can be promoted through Google's PPC or display network.

OTAs

Like them or not, there's untapped revenue to be farmed from OTAs. The commissions notwithstanding, the ROI on alliances with OTAs is very attractive. Use channel partners and an integrated approach to sync all your bookings and have a flexible and dynamic inventory allocation

MEDIA BUYING

If point 1 & 2 are correctly followed, you already know your target audience. They may not always be looking for travel options so find out what do they generally do online. For 5 Star hotels catering to business travelers, news websites are the best place to buy media space.

SOCIAL MEDIA

What about 1 billion strong Facebook users who stay glued to the social network all day long? No matter how you filter your target audience, a major chunk of it is on social platforms and they spend considerably more time there than on any other website or search engines. If you are not there, you do not exist for this billion strong community.

REPUTATION:

Your online reputation, today, is as important as your offline reputations, if not more. Present your brand to the online community in the same light as you have been for years offline. Listen to your guests and prospective guests, respond to them and build a reputation that truly represents you.

DATABASE:

As you get experienced in the online world, prepare to build a strong database of users. From information fed by guests during booking to signing-up for your newsletters, people provide their contact details to you through various means. Manage this data and then use it to reach out to them. Keep in touch, always.

RESOURCES

Build a strong team of professionals to manage your digital activities. Remember, online marketing is not an "add-on," it is a separate revenue stream in itself. Do not relegate the responsibilities of website maintenance, development, SEO, SEM, social media, online reputation and others to professionals who think of this as an "added" and, often, unimportant part of their actual job. A digital marketing manager is a MUST for every hotel today

INTEGRATE

Bring all your online presence to one place and accessible from each platform. Have social media links on the site, have site link on social media channels, have all social platforms integrated on Facebook, newsletter signees on to Facebook, Facebook fans in the newsletter mailing list and so on. If your audience shifts from one platform to another, they should know you are available there as well. Any platform you are unavailable at leads to a breakup of the engagement and re-establishing the connection becomes a challenge

I hope these 10 things will assist you in planning your online marketing or will aid in making the present online initiatives more efficient and effective. The online travel spend is increasing around the world with a steady decline in the offline purchases. The time to go digital is yesterday, but it is never too late to start. Plan, implement, monitor and control.

WEBSITE

SOCIAL MEDIA

OTAs

DATA BASE

MEDIA BUYING



Recently, I had an invigorating conversation with hoteliers and restaurateurs present at the hospitality industry's most sought after event, the FHRAI's event in the West. As a guest speaker, I got to share some interesting trending topics which paved the way for some thought provoking post-session conversations. While I was of the opinion that social media is taking strides and the ship may sail by the time the Indian Hospitality sector got onboard, I was surprised to hear that some of my friends and acquaintances believed that social media is passé already. It was interesting not because it is a peculiar opinion, it was interesting because quite a few of them believed so. When I probed them, I noticed that they have understood the changes in the pattern of our social networking inaccurately, if I can say that.

Yes, those who got hooked onto Facebook and Twitter a few years ago are making less posts / tweets now, they engage less with their friends and create less content now. But what does that mean? Does this mean the fad is finally fading? In one word, no. The average time spent by users of Facebook & Twitter has only increased, along with the user base. So, today, Twitter and Facebook attracts more daily visitors than ever before, who are spending more time on the networks than ever. So why do we feel we are connecting less often or networking less now? It is because we have started using social media for sourcing information rather than poking our friends or making updates / tweets. This is, in my opinion, the perfect situation for marketers. You have a large audience and they are watching every move you make on social media.

True, our behavior has changed but it has changed for good if you are a marketer. With this in mind, I thought of sharing this piece with you which was doing rounds in my head on way back to Delhi from Pune.

As the popular saying goes, the mantra of success is to have an out of the box thinking. I won't get into the debate of substantiating this alleged "wisdom" with data or examples. We can accept it on the face value as innovations lead to unthinkable riches but imitations generally remain just that, imitation. As the world increasingly moved from the real to virtual, certain proven commandments became obsolete with traditional wisdom replaced by contemporary innovative approaches. Having said that, the out of the box thinking probably gained momentum and cemented its position among the online community, the digital marketers included.

Thinking Outside the "Wall" :

**Step Out,
Reach Out,
Hang Out!**

At the expense of sounding inspired, one might relate this conventional wisdom to the attempts by online marketers who no longer want to be restrained by the "Wall" of social networks and want to think outside of it. It is probably too early in the day to discourage businesses from promoting themselves on their Facebook walls or Google Plus' circles, a new breed of marketers are thinking one step ahead and do not want to restrict their target audience by limiting the promotions' focus only on the fan base or their activities within the official page of the business on a networking platform.

It is increasingly becoming important in the social networks that you reach out to your audience rather than sitting back and waiting for clients to come to you. Regular updates on Facebook, Google+, Flickr and regular Tweets have become mundane and ordinary to the extent that a word similar to spamming may be coined for this exercise. The step forward is to think outside of the "Wall" and engage potential clients. This, in essence, means that the online chatter about your

business should be closely monitored on Social Media channels and giving it a direction which is not only favorable to you but can also amount to gaining business.

Taking Twitter as an example, businesses should try to constantly monitor what is trending on this platform and any topic that is even closely related to your area of business should then be exploited. The best part of this exercise is that the topic has already gained significant virality and your participation in it can only add visibility to your business or brand. If you are in hospitality or travel industry, joining communities on Facebook dedicated to travel can give you access to a niche target audience which, without doubt, is interested in travelling. Your active participation in such communities or forums can be immense use to the users seeking information you have expertise in and will conversely help you build confidence among the travel enthusiasts!

The idea is simple, you need to leave the "register and a counter" mentality which meant having to wait for the clients to come in. With Internet open to everyone and the costs involved being minimal if compared to traditional modes of promotions and advertisements, even small businesses can garner same exposure as big brands. As Thomas Friedman put it in his book, "The world is flat", the playing field has been leveled by internet which earlier restricted businesses from competing globally. The world is out there, waiting to be conquered; all you need to do is think outside the "wall".

Make a strategy and start implementing every single day, hire an agency or hire a few guys in house and have a dedicated focus on the social media road ahead.



Increase Revenues by Multi-screen optimization



This time around, I am thinking of writing about a more general digital marketing topic, how the sizes of the screens (and the gadgets people use) are impacting digital marketing in general. Without touching the traditional media, we can think of the following 4 main output screens people use nowadays-

- Desktops
- Laptops
- Palmtops / tablets
- Smartphones



While we can club desktops and Laptops together, we still have tablets and Smartphones which make primarily three types of screen sizes every digital marketer should be aware of. Now, we all know the basics of digital marketing like good content or relevant content, delivered to the right audience at the right time and at the right place (and at the right cost, to you). However, how do you define good content or a relevant message in the contemporary world? A nice graphic when viewed on a smartphone may make no sense while on PC / Laptop it will attract eyeballs like nothing else. A nice website, if not responsive in nature, will alienate all such prospective consumers who primarily use their tablets to surf. The reverse is also true and though there's a decline in PC ownership and Laptop sales not growing as rapidly as they once did, the share of PC / Laptop users among all netizens is still rather huge. So, all your initiatives in the digital domain now need to be customized for each screen and without an escalated cost.



Website:

- The first step is to look at your website. If it is not a responsive design, it is time you took the step of upgrading it.
- If a responsive website is out of your budget, go for a separate mobile site. A low quality mobile site with limited features is still better than no mobile compatible site at all.
- When you think about SEO, think mobile as well. Optimization for mobile sites is way different than the traditional websites and should be treated separately.
- Analyze the traffic on your website. Where does it originate from? Which devices people use? It should give you a fair idea about the need for a mobile compatible website.



Going Social:

- On a PC, it's the images that stand out. As the screen size is big, you can have graphics with text inside them and do away with complementary text with your posts.
- On a tablet, it is still a mix of graphics and text as the screen size is not too small for graphics and text is quite readable. So, a mix of graphics and text will work well with the audience.
- On smartphones, though, text is still the eye catcher. Short and simple, but it is the primary attention grabber and users will then choose to click and enlarge the image. So, text for smaller screens require more thought than for Laptops and tablets.
- Your social media messages for different screens also need to be different. A user on a bigger screen is more likely to "share" your images while more of your quirky text messages will engage users of smartphones. So, virality or engagement of your content will depend on the screen size.
- Also to be noted that same users generally look for the same product on multiple screens and hence the nature of the content should be the same to avoid any incoherency.

Advertising:

Google's PPC program is now fundamentally different for different screens. Yes, most of it depends on the functionality of various devices like "click to call" for mobile phones but even the type of content used is different.

With Display Ads dependent on graphics, the size of text on a graphic needs to be a bit bigger for tablets as compared to bigger screens. For smartphones, Display Ads are not really effective as such so textual ads shall be focused upon.

For smartphones, Facebook Ads so far are not feasible and hence you may consider a bigger budget for Google Ads for mobile phones while Facebook Ad Spent may be considered if your target audience is primarily desktop / Laptop based.



Want to sell more roomnights? Get your phone lines checked !

On my flight to Singapore for an important meeting with the bigwigs of one of the largest hotel chains, I kept thinking about the recent report from our own hotels' Revenue Managers. We were compiling the list of platforms through which our hotels are getting most revenue or roomnights so as to plan for the next quarter. I expected online bookings, social media referrals, search engine traffic and OTAs to show a year on year progressive trend while walk-ins to show a negative trend. I was right for the most part except that I saw a phenomenal rise in the bookings via phone calls to our reservation desk.

Yes, you heard it right. Three of our hotels in Delhi and one in Goa have witnessed unprecedented growth in the number

of phone calls coming in to our call center. I kept thinking what could be the reason considering the entire world now relies on the internet for such purchases. I was determined to find the reason and though there was no specific case study available, data from many sources kept indicating that the rise in phone call reservations is being witnessed around the world. I just had to find an answer and when I read this story on Searchenginewatch.com about Google's latest report on Adwords trends, I knew just how this is happening. It reported that of all the users who made a travel and related purchase after seeing a hotel's paid or organic listing on search page, 70% of them opted to buy through "click to call". They completely bypassed the process of clicking on the link, going to the website, exploring the available tariffs and rooms, viewing the photo gallery and paying via mobile compatible booking engines. They simply called and purchased. Simple.

There are two major developments which are causing more people to call a hotel's reservation desk to make a booking and some other behavioral trends which are aiding this phenomenon.

Phablets:

Around the world, smartphones are quickly replacing laptops / PCs as the preferred mode of a search query. Though mobile phones or phablets still had roughly 30% share among all searches made on Google at the start of 2013, the predicted rate of growth suggests that by the time 2013 ends, phones may have just over 50% share among all search queries. So, what does this mean for your hotel? It means that more of your prospective guests are looking for you through their phone and not their PCs / Laptops. When you are on a PC / Laptop, you have more time at hand to go through the process of booking online and you are more convinced about the security of the transaction. On the phone, however, you are restricted by time, technology (not many mobile compatible booking engines available) and safety. As a result, you can either wait to be near a PC to make the booking or just call the hotel to make a reservation. Seems like that the latter is being preferred.

Search Results:

Another major driver for increase in phone calls to hotels can be found in the way Google displays search results on phones / tablets. As most hotels now have business listings (on Google Maps / Listings), Google prefers showing local listings ahead of regular results for any destination / location specific search. This is the same for PCs & phones. However, you get a "click to call" button on your phone which is not available on PCs / Laptops for obvious reasons. Now, you may think that people could just easily fetch the phone number while browsing on a PC and make a call through their phone but just imagine when was the last time you yourself did that. I can't think of even one such instance in last few years except when I made the search to look specifically for someone's number. Hence, more people now prefer just calling the number by a simple click rather than browsing through the website and attempting to fill a query form or pay via IBE.

The above two are the major drivers for calls flooding the call center but there are other behavioral trends at work as well.

- **Time:** It is a big constraint for the modern man. It is not like we enjoy searching the net on our phones, it is just that it is convenient. It is always connected, it is always accessible. And it can browse as well as call.
- **Security:** Though payment gateways compatible with mobile phones are as safe as the ones we are accustomed to on PCs / Laptops, the users generally do not consider their phones to be same enough to punch in credit card or debit card info. This presumed safety concern leads to more guests opting for a call instead of utilizing the mobile booking engine services
- **Confirmation:** There's nothing like a verbal confirmation that your room has been reserved. Yes, you may have a confirmation mail, a confirmation code, a thank you letter etc but till you have not

"heard" it, you still enter the hotel with the fear of something going wrong.

- **Attention:** Attention span of people around the world is fast dropping down to a few seconds. So, it is rare that you will search for something on phone and delay the action till later when a PC / Laptop is accessible. You would rather finish the job then and there rather than risk forgetting about the website which gave you that awesome deal on your booking.
- **Bargain:** Not in its raw form, but lets face it that hotel customers love to bargain the best deal. Yes, they can compare prices and pick the lowest ones with the best facilities through various OTAs but there's still this bargaining bit which is deemed necessary by customers to be sure they are indeed getting the best deal. A voice at the other end is more convincing than scores of websites with

Not in its raw form, but lets face it that hotel customers love to bargain the best deal. Yes, they can compare prices and pick the lowest ones with the best facilities through various OTAs but there's still this bargaining bit which is deemed necessary by customers to be sure they are indeed getting the best deal. A voice at the other end is more convincing than scores of websites with their glossy banners and auto-mails.

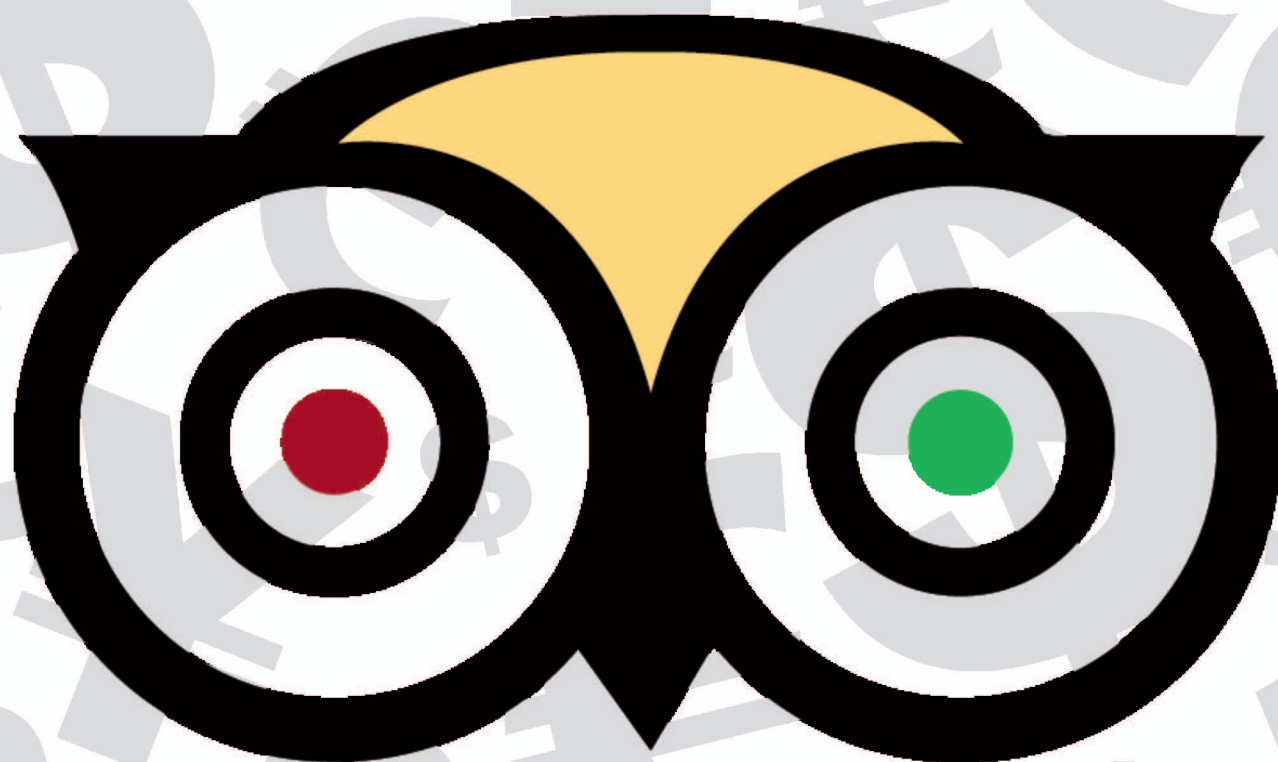
I will say you should check your phone lines, review your operators' skills and invest in their training to sell more. A website will sell what the buyer is buying, your operator can sell much more.



Increasing Revenue via

tripadvisor®

Management



Reminiscing the year 2012, one can not help but feel we have come a long way from total lack of awareness about TripAdvisor & the importance of online reputation management (ORM) to a sense of urgency among hoteliers about their hotel's reputation in the virtual world.

Before we touch base on how hotels can increase bookings via effective management of their brand's reputation, it is prudent to share a few raw facts about TripAdvisor-

- Average number of reviews per property per year in 2012 is around 332 (globally) with TripAdvisor reviews cornering a major share of all reviews
- 81% of all travelers, around the world, at least once consult a review site before making the final decision on hotel reservation. Please note TripAdvisor is the most favored referral site which travelers consult before making a travel plan.
- 41% of all travelers wrote at least 1 review in the past 6 months
- 49% travelers confessed that they are "strongly" influenced by other travelers' reviews
- TripAdvisor's Indian website is supposed to have received more than 5 million hits in the year 2012 and is expected to grow at a much more rapid pace this year.



Now that we have established the relevance of review sites in general and TripAdvisor in particular, the question is no longer "if you should" but "how you should" manage your online reputation.

Managing reviews on TripAdvisor is a necessity and is not necessarily an added expense. The better you manage your property's listing on TripAdvisor, better are the chances of cashing in on the opportunities thrown open by the review portal.

A direct relation between reviews and revenues can be deduced from the following-

Number of reviews:

TripAdvisor ranks such hotels better which have more reviews than other properties. Why? Because more people writing about you means more people have stayed with you and that indicates popularity of your property. Yes, reviews can be bad but the global average suggests that the share of positive reviews is considerably higher than average or adverse reviews and more importantly, travelers like reviewing a property more so when they have a good time. One good reason why hotels should not be afraid of reviews.

Share of positive reviews:

Yes, the rankings will definitely be better. But, if 49% travelers are "strongly" influenced by reviews then you can directly relate it with your revenue. At least 49% of the people who are planning to book with you will eventually book you. The other 51% are still up for grabs but you are safe with at least half of the target audience.

The "recency" of the reviews:

It is not enough to do a blitzkrieg and have satisfied guests put in the "good word". Just how recent your reviews are plays an important role in determining your ranking of TripAdvisor. So, more of your recent guests writing about you, the better your rankings are. Better rankings mean better chances of convincing a prospective guest to book with you.

Management Responses:

When all is said and done, review websites' fundamental function is to let the world know what a property is worth. If your guests are all praises then you know what your strengths are. If your guests are critical then you know what your weaknesses are. Think of the criticism as a "free" audit of your services, investigate the issues and eradicate them.