

A GUIDE TO

SOCIAL MEDIA

2012

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INTRODUCTION

A social media guide for conference centers.

It's as simple as that. As the Emerging Trends Committee, we wanted to create a gift for the members of IACC - a gift that keeps on giving. Social media is a space for new connections to be made, friendships to be fostered and online relationships that blossom into loyal clients. Whether, you need the entire guide, a refresher or just a "brush up," we wish you luck in your social endeavors; we know you'll do well.

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BLOG

DESCRIPTION

Blogs are mini-articles that provide commentary on a particular subject. A typical blog combines text, images, video, links to other blogs, web pages and other media related to its topic. The blog offers some way for readers to interact with the author.

TARGET MARKET

Potential and current guests, hospitality industry, trade press, loyal guests of hotel and hotel amenities, meeting and event planners, conference organizers and vendors.

OBJECTIVE

To create brand awareness and excitement through creative storytelling about meetings, activities, your property's initiatives and ways to experience your destination. Ultimate objective is for the property to connect and engage travelers and guests through exciting content. On the meetings side, the objective is to provide a useful perspective to connect with other professionals in the meetings industry.

HOW TO START

Decide on your conference center's objective or goal in blogging. Create a strategy for a blog about weddings, meetings or leisure activity by dividing into 3 separate blogs to create its own entity. Determine your range of topics, who your target audience is, how often you'll blog and the method of generating views to your posts. With your conference center's objective in mind, determine the title of your blog, domain name and the blogging platform that helps you reach this mission. Some platforms emphasize photos, whereas others focus on content. The graphic theme of your blog should match the conference center's branding.

In-house or out-source? In-house is cheaper and often better plays the "voice" role for the conference center. If your conference center chooses in-house, your blog should a.) have one individual who handles all b.) have a team of associates who take turns blogging c.) a team of associates who play a different role in the stages of blogging by generating topic ideas, research, writing, editing and publishing.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Blog only when you have something to say! A blog isn't a soapbox or an online press room; it should be resourceful to your target audience.
2. All posts should leave the reader with the impression that you spent a lot of time thinking about the post and how to "wow" them. Blogs should be 400-600 words and should not be written like a newspaper article.
3. Stick to your goal of blogging whether it's weekly, bi-weekly or daily. As a rule of thumb, blog at a minimum of two times a month or don't blog at all.
4. Always have a photo to couple with the content. Try and mix it up with videos and slide shows. Offering contests/trivia on your conference center blog is a sure way to generate excitement.
5. Follow blogging etiquette, leave insightful comments on other industry blogs and respond to comments on your blog; the bloggers that comment deserve a thank you and/or a response.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Ace Conference Center Blog
Pacific Palms Resort Blog
Q Center Blog
The Woodlands Resort Blog
Skamania Lodge Wedding Blog
Kellogg Conference Hotel Blog

MEMBER

Sarah Vining, National Conference Center



DESCRIPTION

Twitter is a social networking site that enables users to micro-blog by sending and reading text-based posts of up to 140 characters, informally known as “tweets”. Tweets can be composed of links to sites, articles and photos. Twitter is a channel to share interesting news, make new connections and converse.

TARGET MARKET

Current and potential clients, guests, travel and tourism affiliates, hospitality industry, trade-press, planners, conference organizers, local organizations and professionals, thought-leaders in the meetings industry, and vendors.

OBJECTIVE

To engage prospective and current clients in conversation by connecting with them and sharing unique yet relevant information in 140 characters. Ultimate goal is to create a voice for your conference center and build a loyal clientele through your social media personality, customer service, transparency and connectivity.

HOW TO START

Brainstorm and determine the objective of the Twitter account. With the objective in mind, distinguish between factors such as:

- The type of account
- The target audience
- What the voice will sound like
- Type of tweets
- How often you will tweet and who will manage the account(s)

Choose a Twitter name that is simple, short and represents the end-goal of the account, i.e. conference center tweets or wedding tweets. Create a bio, add your desired URL to drive traffic, upload a photo and begin tweeting.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. A hashtag is simply a pound sign with text behind it; it's a way to categorize certain types of tweets. Search for a few and follow them; try #eventprofs #MPI and connect with other industry tweeps. You can create your own.
2. Sign in each day to thank your followers or those that mention your property. Engage others in a fun or enlightening conversation. Rule of thumb: Promote others 10x more than your own conference center.
3. Track your tweets through Bit.ly or Google URL Builder to see what topics generated the most clicks and interest from your followers.
4. Don't overuse the retweet button which is portrayed as unauthentic; other ways to share what tweeps have said is to add value to the conversation such as “What do you think?”
5. Search Twitter for different variations of your property's name, names of the lounges, golf courses and choose ‘Save this Search’. Use this tool daily to greet guests, provide problem resolution or answer questions.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center [@woodlandsresort](#)
The Founders Inn [@foundersinn](#)
Banff Centre [@thebanffcentre](#)
Executive Conference Center Wyndham Lisle Chicago Hotel [@WyndhamLisle](#)
Pacific Palms Resort [@pacificpalms](#)

MEMBER

Sarah Vining, National Conference Center



TWITTER PHOTOS/TWITPIC/YFROG OW.LY/INSTAGRAM

DESCRIPTION

Twitter Photos is a function to take and share photos within the mobile app. Twitter Gallery aggregates photos from all past shared photos on Twitter. TwitPic, yFrog and Ow.ly are third-party tools that enable users to share photos and video with social networks via mobile app or website. Instagram is an iPhone app that allows users to take and edit photos before sharing with social networks; it's best described as a basic Photoshop app.

TARGET MARKET

Audience on Twitter, Facebook and/or Flickr

OBJECTIVE

To share real-time photos of a moment or event with a relevant caption. It provides a visual for audiences on Facebook, Twitter and Flickr while supporting the promotion of a particular initiative or event.

HOW TO START

Know your purpose in downloading the app and what type of (appropriate) photos will be shared your social media audience. Based on the objective, simply use Twitter Photos or download a photo app and create a conference center account. If possible, link the account to other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter for easy sharing.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Tweet live from events with photos and a hashtag to stir discussion. Real-time tweets about events perform better in terms of interest than tweets about the past.
2. Use Instagram to make a photo even more interesting and artistic; post to the conference center's Facebook fan page and Twitter. Use TwitPic and yFrog for tweeting on the go, such as live tweeting from an event or behind-the-scenes photos within the conference center.
3. Create short videos no longer than 20 seconds on TwitPic and yFrog to share a brief clip on Twitter.
4. Host a contest. Use the conference center's social media channel to share pictures through these apps as clues in a contest or ask followers to participate by tweeting/posting pictures from around the property, also reaching their followers and beyond.
5. Turn your Instagram photos into postcards, coffee cups, posters or mini-books as client giveaways.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Kings Mill Resort
San Ramon Valley Conference Center
Aspen Meadows Resort

MEMBER

Sarah Vining, National Conference Center



FACEBOOK BUSINESS PAGE

DESCRIPTION

Facebook business page is a social networking website where users can become a fan of your conference center. As a fan, users can engage in conversation with the brand through comments, likes, photos, mentions, check-ins and more.

TARGET MARKET

Potential guests, hospitality industry, trade press, loyal guests of hotel and hotel amenities, meeting and/or event planners, conference organizers, clients, local professionals, and vendors.

OBJECTIVE

To reveal more about your conference center and interact with your audience through posted questions, trivia, photos, and blogs to engage them.

HOW TO START

Distinguish the conference center's objective in creating a Facebook, the type of posts, and how often. Set up a profile by choosing local business, uploading a non-brochure looking profile picture, completing basic information and begin uploading photo albums and videos. Invite conference center associates to "like" the page and encourage interaction such as comments. When you start producing posts, announce the new page to clients and guests and ask them to become a fan.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES *(advice)*

1. Generate content with photos and pose questions on a daily basis. Monitor the page, interact with fans and listen to the positive and negative feedback of vocal guests.
2. Observe what your followers comment on and keep the information relevant to the business and the audience's interest.
3. Pose fun questions and make it social but don't overwhelm your followers by posting more than twice a day. Posts that appear on Thursday afternoons and/or Saturday mornings generate the most traffic.
4. Encourage customers to check-in at your conference center. Others will become curious and research your property; it's free publicity and an inexpensive way to grow your customer and business base. Check-ins can also be used on your retail side such as a coffee shop or business center to attract potential customers.
5. Load pictures of client events; people enjoy seeing tagged photos from events, tagging each other and commenting. It's a good way for a conference center to be in the middle of all the action.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

*The Blackwell
The Chattanooga Hotel
Eaglewood Resort and Spa*

MEMBER

Lori Keene, The Millenium Centre

YOUTUBE

DESCRIPTION

YouTube is a video-sharing website where users can create a channel. Registered accounts can upload, edit, and share videos as well as view others' videos. Users also have the ability to tag videos as "favorites", "friend" other users, subscribe to channels, and leave comments.

TARGET MARKET

Guests, planners, conference organizers, prospective and current clients, thought-leaders in the meetings industry and trade press.

OBJECTIVE

To interact with your audience through videos that showcase your property, make up a series or present attributes of your area or center.

HOW TO START

Before purchasing a hand-held video camera or posting videos, determine your objective in creating a YouTube channel. Begin brainstorming video ideas for the specific target audience. Sign-up for a YouTube account by creating a Google account. Choose a user name that reflects your property to be displayed on your channel URL. Start uploading videos from a computer, phone or webcam and customize the channel's appearance to match the conference center's branding.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Utilize YouTube's video editor while signed into YouTube - no software downloads are required. Combine multiple video clips, trim the length of your video, add music using AudioSwap, and add transitions between video clips. Once you are happy with your video, upload it to your YouTube channel and share.
2. Visit the analytics tab in your account to learn about the viewer demographics. Through analytics, you can better understand your YouTube audience and which videos are popular or unpopular.
3. Viewers can respond to your posted videos by adding a comment beneath the player. They can also rate the quality of other people's comments by clicking "Like" or "Dislike" to the right of the comment. If fully utilized, this is a great tool that will highlight your property's most prolific videos.
4. When uploading a video choose keyword search terms and phrases relevant to the video for better search engine optimization.
5. To share YouTube videos, embed into any website or blog, click "Embed" then just copy and paste the code into the HTML version of your site or blog. You can also share your favorite YouTube videos and YouTube activity with your friends on your social networks.
6. [Climb the Creative Ladder]: Compose a creative video giving a tour of your property and amenities, showing your product in action. Introduce your staff to add authenticity or ask others to use your property in their videos (like product placement in movies) and cross-promote each other.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

National Conference Center
DoubleTree by Hilton Bethesda
Glen Cove Mansion Hotel and Conference Center

MEMBER

Purvi Bhatt, R. David Thomas Executive Conference Center

DESCRIPTION

LinkedIn is a professional social networking site where users complete their online resume and make new connections. LinkedIn fosters past and present relationships by allowing individuals to connect on a professional yet social space.

TARGET MARKET

Potential, current and past clients, professional contacts, vendors, trade press, industry professionals, past and present colleagues, family and friends.

OBJECTIVE

To connect with other professionals and build a rapport by either beginning or extending a business relationship through the professional social networking site.

HOW TO START

When most people start setting up their LinkedIn profile, they provide headlines and not details. Keep in mind that the most important thing is to have a presence (you can gain some of the key benefits without being a power user). To get started, you will need to fill in these 8 pieces of information about yourself:

- Summary - Big picture description of your work experience and what motivates you
- Specialties - Some of your main skills
- Experience - A brief description of your work at each position
- Education - Degrees and other university achievements
- Recommendations - These can be written by any of your LinkedIn connections
- Additional Information - Links to company website or your other social media pages
- Personal Information - Ways you can be contacted
- Contact Preferences - Reasons you would like to be contacted

After you've created a profile, start adding connections. LinkedIn has a feature that will search your email for contacts on LinkedIn. You can also look for people by entering their name in the search box. Once you've started adding connections, LinkedIn will begin suggesting possible connections based on your common connections, industry and geographic location.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. A good way to improve your profile is to benchmark with colleagues. If you can find the ones that have built up their profile, reference their profile for information you may have forgotten to include.
2. Sync your blog with LinkedIn; when you publish a new post, your LinkedIn will update so interested connections and others can then easily click on your blog to read more or subscribe.
3. To share your expertise, become active in answering questions in LinkedIn's "Question and Answer" section. Every question you answer will become a permanent part of your profile, allowing connections and others to see your wealth of knowledge.
4. Another way to build your credibility is to participate in LinkedIn discussions. Provide insight on industry group discussions and "make a name for yourself" as well as your conference center.
5. Connect with a new client on LinkedIn after ending a call or post-meeting. By connecting on another medium, it makes the relationship more personable.
6. [Climb the Creative Ladder]: Explore LinkedIn training and advice from Lindsey Pollak, a global spokesperson for LinkedIn and workplace/Gen Y expert. View her [LinkedIn](#) for best practices.

MEMBER

Zion Spencer, Megsys Hospitality Systems



LINKEDIN BUSINESS PAGE

DESCRIPTION

LinkedIn business page is an opportunity for companies to share information about their mission and services as well as obtain followers. LinkedIn business page aggregates automatic feed on Google News and company blog posts to share on the company's LinkedIn profile.

TARGET MARKET

Potential and current employees, planners, conference organizers, clients, local organizations, professionals, media and thought-leaders in the meetings industry.

OBJECTIVE

To offer additional information about your conference center brand for LinkedIn users who are interested in following your company professionally without the other noise. A LinkedIn follower is seeking information about the company such as news and current and past employees.

HOW TO START

When you set up a company profile on LinkedIn, it will increase your opportunities to network with clients, vendors, peers and potential job candidates. Businesses can update their individual company pages to enable their followers to receive updates and insights about job opportunities, company news, employee moves, and more. When you create your company overview page, use informative descriptions about whom you serve (your ideal customer) and how you serve them. Complete the designated specialties area and use keywords that will resonate with your target markets. Build out your products and services pages on your profile to include an image, description, list of key features, landing page URL to your site, a link to a special promotion and embed a YouTube video. Once you have completed setting up your LinkedIn company page, you will want to enable the page for status updates. You must officially designate who can update the company page within your settings. Once you've completed this, designated people within your company will be able to post status updates to your page.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES *(advice)*

1. Increasing your company followers will increase your company visibility. Your updates will be seen throughout LinkedIn and can easily be shared by your followers with their professional networks. Building followers for your company isn't just a one-time process. You should be working constantly to build followers for your company page on LinkedIn in order to expand your reach.
2. Encourage existing employees to follow the page and help extend your company's reach by sharing company news and blog posts with their connections on LinkedIn.
3. Follow the company pages of industry peers, vendors, current and prospective customers; many of them will reciprocate the action.
4. Follow companies outside of your industry that are in your same geographic location.
5. If you want to engage followers, make it all about them and provide interesting value-added updates that can help them to succeed in their business.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

*The Banff Centre
National Conference Center*

MEMBER

Zion Spencer, Megasy's Hospitality Systems



DESCRIPTION

Flickr is an online community for image and video hosting. Users utilize Flickr as an online gallery to showcase a collection of photos to the public and make them more easily searchable and organized.

TARGET MARKET

Potential clients, guests and fans from other social media platforms.

OBJECTIVE

To create albums of photos that are high-resolution or events hosted by the conference center (not typically posted on the main website).

HOW TO START

Brainstorm types of photos that will be posted on the conference center's Flickr account. Purchase a point-and-shoot or digital SLR camera for the conference center in order to have consistent semi-professional looking images. Sign-up for a Flickr account by creating a Yahoo account. Choose a user name that reflects your property which will be displayed in a Flickr URL. Upload professional photos of your Conference Center's interior and exterior; neighborhood and city attractions. Tag all with the appropriate geo-locations and complete the conference center's Flickr profile.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Share original content. Empty meeting rooms aren't exciting. Try event photos; don't forget captions, dates and geo-locations.
2. Upload photos that are the inside happenings of your conference center, include behind-the-scenes photos of the kitchen or food preparation and presentation. YUM!
3. Flickr has SEO (search engine optimization) benefits! You can include image titles and keywords in your descriptions. Placing a URL of a related page on your website can really improve optimization.
4. Use Flickr's powerful tool dubbed, the Organizer, to manage your photos in batches or sets.
5. Create a conference center profile where you can share staff photos and employee events on property. Tell a story through the photos. Guests and clients can relate to good old-fashion fun on the job.
6. [Climb the Creative Ladder]: Purchase the Pro Account to upload as many photos as you want in a month and have the tools to analyze the stats. Pro Accounts allow you to determine where your account's incoming traffic is generated. One of the huge benefits of Flickr is that Google Images and other referencing sites tap into it this information, which maximizes your traffic.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Executive Meeting Center at Westin Southfield Hotel
ARAMARK Conference Centers
Woodlands Resort and Conference Center
Aspen Meadows Resort
Unique Venues

MEMBER

David Haas, Northern Illinois University Conference Centers

DESCRIPTION

Google+ profiles are a way for users and conference centers to represent themselves on Google products and across the web. A typical Google+ profile includes images, text, video and shared content.

TARGET MARKET

Planners, industry professionals, current and future guests, conference and social event attendees.

OBJECTIVE

To share content with your target audiences and continue to build those relationships, share photos from events at your conference center. By having a Google+ profile it also improves your conference center search engine rankings.

HOW TO START

To get started on Google+ you will want to set-up your profile on the social network. This process will be very similar to setting up a profile on a social network like Facebook. Create a “local business or place” page and fill out as many of the fields as possible, which will greatly assist you in the search engine results. Make sure to write a compelling “headline” for your profile (the text at the top of the profile) as this will serve as the page’s meta description in search engines. As you are completing the “introduction” section, think about what you can link out to from this section using targeted keywords. Do you have any great resources that clearly explain what your conference center has to offer? This is something you would want to link to in this section as your Google+ page has tremendous SEO value. Use the “recommended links section” on the right hand side of your Google+ page to link out to your main website as well as other blogs or social media presences you may have.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. What may be interesting to a prospective guest at your property may not be as interesting to an other one of your target audiences. Different people are going to be interested in different types of content that you may share. Use the “Circles” feature to share only the most relevant content to each person.
2. Add the +1 button to your blog or website(s) where users could share this content on Google+. Having content, resources, or photos of your conference center shared on Google+ is not only a great way to get visibility, it’s also a great way to build your own presence and following on Google+.
3. Photos are a huge hit on Google+. Photos not only look brilliant, it increases engagement and followership. Frequent, relevant and helpful images on your profile also help to trigger Google’s image search.
4. Google+ allows basic formatting to your posts which is another advantage of this social network that many others don’t offer. You can add some flair to your posts by using this feature to add headlines or separate blocks of text. Use the format text to bold or italicize a word or phrase. This is sure to get your post some extra attention in your follower’s Google+ news feed.
5. Google+ is still a rapidly growing social network, so don’t get discouraged if you don’t have instant results. Consider creating your Google+ profile an investment in your conference center’s search engine ranking and in its social future. When Google+ becomes the social network du jour your conference center will be prepared to dominate this space. Stay focused on consistently sharing relevant, targeted content here and you will eventually reap the benefits.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

MEMBER

Cvent

Laura Wilson, Cvent



DESCRIPTION

Pinterest is a virtual pinboard that allows users to organize and share images or videos that are on the web or uploaded from their computer.

TARGET MARKET

Planners, industry professionals, current and future clients, conference and social event attendees.

OBJECTIVE

To share interesting images of your conference center that brands it in a unique and appealing way. Pinning images of different types of events that your conference center has hosted can act as an online portfolio and will allow you to engage with other Pinterest users who may not have previously heard about your conference center.

HOW TO START

Before you can create a Pinterest account you must be invited. There are two ways to be invited: you can request an invitation on Pinterest.com by providing your email address or you can have a coworker or friend that already has a Pinterest account send you an invitation. Once your Pinterest account is set-up, create a name, add a visually appealing picture, and write a brief description of your venue and services. The next step is to think about the different boards that you would like to create. Make sure that your boards highlight the best features of your conference center. When you begin getting a good following, start to engage with your audience. "Like" other pins that other vendors or followers have added to their pinboards. If a follower comments or "likes" one of your pins, be sure to comment back and keep the conversation flowing.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Keep your Pinterest boards simple yet stunning. There is a 500 character limit on picture captions, which means your descriptions should be clear and to the point. The #1 thing that users on Pinterest want to see are distinct pictures, not lengthy captions.
2. Pin on a regular basis. As long as you are pinning regularly, your name is constantly going to be showing up on your followers' feeds. It is also nice to re-pin pictures from preferred vendors.
3. Use relevant keywords when writing captions for your pins. This will give your content a better chance of being found by users who are searching that keyword and increase the traffic on your page.
4. Pinterest generates a lot of traffic! Embed links when uploading images so that users can click on them and be taken straight to your website.
5. If you take pride in the cuisine that your chef makes, make a board that shows pictures of your conference center's food and beverage. Other board ideas include pictures of weddings and special events at your conference center or a board that highlights interesting and appealing images of local scenery and landmarks.
6. [Climb the Creative Ladder]: Integrate your Pinterest with other social networking platforms. Add a "Pin It" button to your website or Facebook. If you go on the Pinterest website and click on "About" at the top right corner of the page, you will be directed to the "What is Pinterest" page. On the left-hand side, click on "Goodies". Scroll to the bottom and you will get directions on how to add a "Pin It" button to your website. This will allow current and potential customers to pin your products on their Pinterest boards.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

*AT&T Hotel and Conference Center
Embassy Suites, Loveland Hotel, Spa & Conference Center
West Belmont Place at The National Conference Center*

MEMBER

Rachael Mull, National Conference Center



DESCRIPTION

SCVNGR is social location-based marketing game. Smart phone users compete in challenges and journeys for “rewards” offered by the location or business.

TARGET MARKET

Guests, conference participants, conference organizers, media and trade press.

OBJECTIVE

To create trivia challenges central to your conference center or city so guests can become acquainted with information about the area and property. Users earn points on the gaming app by answering trivia questions and completing challenges about the conference center or destination.

HOW TO START

Before creating a SCVNGR challenge for guests, you should know a few things: a) if your local CVB or DMO has already created a trek so your efforts aren't duplicated, b) if your local CVB or DMO would like to partner in creating one. If your conference center's lounge or bar is unique and represents the destination as a whole, you could become a stop in their trek, c) whether you want to create a challenge at your property. Who makes up your target audience, how many challenges will exist and the reward. For conference centers who want to build small, SCVNGR offers 5 complimentary challenges. For any companies who build SCVNGRs with 15 or more challenges, there is tiered pricing.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Educate your staff on your SCVNGR challenges a week before it's rolled out so they're well-versed with the app and can answer guests' questions.
2. Drive traffic to some of your amenities on property such as a bar or spa by creating challenges at the particular location.
3. Make the challenges possible and offer higher points for locations where you want to direct traffic. Users typically choose five point challenges over five one-point challenges.
4. Print small SCVNGR cards and keep them at the front desk promoting your location-based marketing game. Announce on the Facebook Welcome Tab and other locations that SCVNGR is at your conference center.
5. Offer a reward that is obtainable with points. Think complimentary fitness center use during their stay, free pastry, coffee or half-off a future night stay. SCVNGR rewards build loyalty and will grow your business.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Mission Bay Conference Center at UCSF
AT&T Hotel and Conference Center
National Conference Center

MEMBER

Sarah Vining, National Conference Center



FOURSQUARE/GOWALLA

DESCRIPTION

Foursquare is a social location-based platform for smart phone users. Users check-in virtually to locations, earn points, post tips and can link their “check-in” to various social media accounts such as Twitter or Facebook.

TARGET MARKET

Leisure guests, business travelers, conference attendees, media, hospitality and tourism industry.

OBJECTIVE

To promote businesses especially hotels, conference centers and their amenities such as restaurants, spas and lounges through word of mouth marketing. Users check-in virtually and share their location with their networks. Foursquares offers a map, tips from other users, and specials offered by the venue.

HOW TO START

A conference center can get started on a Foursquare business listing by first searching for possible existing listing(s) of their venue and choosing “claiming this venue”. If the venue does not yet exist on Foursquare, create the venue. When claiming or creating a venue, you must answer a series of questions and submit a PIN number provided by Foursquare via phone or mail verification. Once claimed, venue managers are able to customize how their conference center appears on Foursquare.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Identify your top customers by analyzing the data from the Foursquare page. The best part about Foursquare for a conference center is that the social media tool is free!
2. Grow your business with Foursquare specials! Create and update special campaigns within Foursquare at any given time. The special can attract new business or reward current clients, i.e. reward most loyal customers with something free at the gift shop or even provide a discount to new check-ins at the conference center.
3. Create a Foursquare check-in for multiple locations on property such as the spa, bars, restaurants or lounges. Offer specials or leave tips from your conference center account at the other check-ins.
4. Another secret to Foursquare for conference centers is the ability to identify their greatest customers. With using the tool Merchant Dashboard on the Foursquare page, a conference center is able to view over any specific time total daily check-ins, most recent visitors, most frequent visitors, gender breakdown of customers, what time of day people check-in, and what portion of your Foursquare check-ins are broadcasted on Twitter and Facebook.
5. The guests can also leave feedback to the conference center on Foursquare by leaving “tips”. The “tips” assist the guest in choices as well as the conference center in finding out what guests liked and disliked. By responding to tips, positive and negative reviews can be addressed instantly.
6. [Climb the Creative Ladder]: Hilton offers a “Loyalty Special”. Guests who link their Foursquare account at www.topguest.com/hilton receive 50 Hilton HHonors points every time they check in at a Hilton. Suggest rewards like to this to the executive level e-commerce team for your center’s brand.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

DoubleTree by Hilton North Shore Hotel & Conference Center
Sheraton Dallas Hotel

MEMBER

Mariel Iverson, DoubleTree by Hilton North Shore Hotel & Conference Center

QR CODES

Like



DESCRIPTION

QR (Quick Response) codes are a square-shaped 2D code of modules in a square pattern. The coded information can be scanned on a smart phone. Scanning the code with a QR code reader app such as Scan Life leads the user to the creator's desired location such as a URL.

TARGET MARKET

Guests, potential clients, on-property attendees, tradeshow attendees, planners and target audience for purchased media/ads.

OBJECTIVE

To link a user instantly to desired information such as a video, contact information or email sign-up. QR codes help increase brand awareness through convenience technology. Users are able to access a website instantly without having to remember a URL or type a phone number.

HOW TO START

Before generating QR codes, think of your mission in creating one. Decide on a teaser and a QR Code (URL) to link your audience to fun content or videos. Generating QR codes is an easy process. Access any of the following websites to help you create QR codes: Kaywa, GoQR or Bit.ly. Smart phone users will require a QR code reader installed on their phone (such as ScanLife). Nearly all of these applications are free and the program simply uses the phone's camera to process the data. Most current advertising campaigns explain how QR codes work and the steps to take to scan them on the material.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Create a QR code that is directing the user to a specific action or place; it should always be more interactive and engaging than directing the user to the homepage of a website.
2. For users without smart phones or who don't want to scan, be sure to always place a short and simple trackable URL below the QR code to widen the viewing audience.
3. QR codes have a wide range of applications: Scavenger Hunts a.) fun and engaging team activities, users can check in to a place they visit or answer trivia questions when they scan the code, b.) self-guided tours of your conference center or c.) use QR codes on the menu to introduce your Chef or play a video of the chef preparing the food!
4. Use Likify to generate Facebook links using QR codes. It has the official "Like" button attached to the code. Scan this one the one above to "like" IACC on Facebook.
5. You can use QR codes on direct mail, posters, or business cards. Or, implement them on shameless self-promotion on coffee cups, t-shirts and laptop stickers. They have been spotted on billboards and in Time Square on storefront windows.
6. [Climb the Creative Ladder]: You can edit the aesthetic look of black and white QR codes by using photo editing programs to make unique designs that are fun. If Photoshop isn't an option, try Unitaglive.com to customize QR codes.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Kellogg West Conference and Lodge
National Conference Center
Northern Illinois University Conference Center

MEMBER

David Haas, Northern Illinois University Conference Center

GROUPON/LIVINGSOCIAL: CONSUMER & TRAVEL



DESCRIPTION

Groupon and LivingSocial are companies that feature daily discounted coupons for consumers online. Users can download the app, subscribe to the daily email or visit the website to view and purchase heavily discounted deals in their area or a destination.

TARGET MARKET

Planners, loyal or prospective guests, clients or local residents.

OBJECTIVE

To offer deals and drive business with vouchers that are pre-paid by consumers. It creates brand awareness, moves inventory in a particularly slow period, creates opportunities for exposure in the market and potentially creates new loyal guests. For example, a lounge on property could offer a deal of \$5 towards \$10 of appetizers or a hotel could offer escapes at \$178 weeknight/\$235 weekend with \$50 restaurant credit, complimentary bottle of champagne and free valet parking.

HOW TO START

Groupon and LivingSocial will help you determine a deal, but all properties should consider selling slow moving dates in inventory or inexpensive items without offering a deal that could prove too costly for the property. Speak to other industry professionals who may have used the service for their property and see if it was positive or negative result. Remember that all properties are different.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES *(advice)*

1. Once the deal has expired, check all expenses in and out to determine if it was a positive method of driving business and whether your property should participate in offering a future deal.
2. Consider capping the number of deals offered. Users who were unable to purchase the deal before it sold out will be curious about your property or services, thus creating awareness.
3. These types of promotions should be done for a specific, narrow, and limited reason. The intention is to build loyalty by offering something that will encourage consumers to come back to you again.
4. Avoid offering deals that could affect your brand. Always choose to offer a deal or promotions that will positively affect your conference center.
5. Treat the consumers of these deals as you would a typical customer. Give your guests an experience that will make them want to brag and tell others to visit your property.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

*DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Bethesda
La Toretta Lake Resort and Spa
Estancia La Jolla Hotel and Conference Center
Founders Inn*

MEMBER

Zion Spencer, Megasys Hospitality Systems

FOODSPOTTING

DESCRIPTION

Foodspotting is a visual guide to good food and where to find it. As a geolocation app, it's the easiest way for users to find and share the foods they love.

TARGET MARKET

Local residents, foodies, guests, potential guests and devoted foodie meeting planners.

OBJECTIVE

To create interest and generate food and beverage revenue through photos of menu selections available at restaurants or lounges. Foodspotting is a great way to advertise your conference center's food and beverage capabilities and location. Your guest can become a dish expert!

HOW TO START

The simplest way to get started on Foodspotting is to begin recommending dishes and sharing your love for food on the Foodspotting website and apps with your own conference center dishes. The conference center should claim their location to promote food & beverage outlets and nearby destination dining establishments and "foodspot" on a regular basis. Once one establishes a rapport on Foodspotting, the followers will begin to rate and review. It is suggested a conference center develop a guide, which is a checklist of the best food & beverage options. The guide acts as a game for the conference center's Foodspotting followers. Similar to Foursquare, guests can receive promotions and incentives for completing guides and rating dishes.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Encourage your guests to post pictures of your dishes, breaks and meal presentations. Foodspotting can be beneficial for conference centers since the meeting package includes a full day of food & beverage. For most meeting planners, it is very important to have good food - and a good variety!
2. Host an incentive contest for guests who can post the most Foodspotting photos at your location with their personal ordered entrees. This will require them to continue dining at your restaurant and also expose their followers to the dishes, building an interest in others.
3. Tweet recent Foodspotting photos and thank spotters, if possible.
4. Posting your conference center's photos will enable you to put your best foot forward on presentation and quality. Creating a guide is a great idea for a week long conference. If the guests are dining in the conference center outlets and event conferee dining, the attendee can rate each meal and begin their collector's guide. The conference center can post contests and scavenger hunts for the attendees.
5. Invite press into a special Chef tasting and ask them to post live Foodspotting photos during their experience. It'll be interactive for them and reach a large audience of their followers on social media networks. The Foodspotting would also make for a great piece in their overall story.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Mission Bay Conference Center
Bell Harbor International Conference Center

MEMBER

Mariel Iverson, DoubleTree by Hilton North Shore Hotel & Conference Center

DESCRIPTION

Yelp is a site where users review and recommend hotels/conference centers, restaurants, shopping, nightlife, entertainment, services and more.

TARGET MARKET

Planners and guests.

OBJECTIVE

To offer guests and planners the ability to review and view unbiased reviews of a venue. Provides conference centers the ability to manage their listing and respond to reviews from past guests.

HOW TO START

First, go to: <https://biz.yelp.com/support> and unlock all of your business accounts, including the conference center, restaurants, lounges and spas. Then update your business information for accuracy and upload pictures or video (all free of charge). If there are current reviews that have been written by previous guests in the past month, you can respond to those in an unbiased and caring manner.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Responding to reviews is a great way to learn from your most vocal customers and build goodwill. Yelp allows businesses to respond publicly and privately to reviews - just keep it simple and polite. Yelpers appreciate honesty and like to know when businesses make changes based on their feedback.
2. Offer a Deal on the listing of other similar businesses to a prospective patron interested in particular services. Again, the “[Business Support Center](#)” outlines how to set this up and has a “FAQ” link.
3. There is an app for Yelp which allows users to check reviews and find businesses based on their current location. Maintaining positive reviews and offering deals can help increase revenue and build a larger clientele for spontaneous Yelp app users.
4. If the property has a special offer or relevant news, complete the announcement section and add a tracking code to keep tabs on those who click and convert. Update this section frequently to keep things fresh and never leave your page looking dusty.
5. Host an event for Elite yelpers. Elite is a status obtained by the number of Yelp reviews done by individuals; they are often viewed by others as influential. Hosting an event for them could be a great way to showcase your product and services.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Dolce Hayes Mansion
MIT Endicott House

MEMBER

Kasey Sanders, Hamilton Park Hotel & Conference Center



DESCRIPTION

TripAdvisor is a website where users write reviews, post photos and offer travel advice on flights, hotels and vacations. The website also has the capability for users to “compare prices with just one click.”

TARGET MARKET

Planners and guests.

OBJECTIVE

To allow guests and planners the ability to review and view unbiased opinions. Public can also reserve overnight accommodations through TripAdvisor.

HOW TO START

Your first step will be to visit the site and select the type of business that you manage. Find your business and unlock it. Then register yourself as an owner of the business. Update your listing with photos, video, and descriptions similar to how you would create any paid listing on industry publications. This is all free of charge and allows you to manage your business info and respond to reviews.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Thank patrons for positive feedback or let guests know what you are doing to improve a negative experience.
2. Encourage new reviews by sending a link of your Trip Advisor listing via email to clients or embed the link on your company website.
3. This site is another great opportunity for free advertising in the search listings, but you must keep an eye on reviews and respond when appropriate. A few bad reviews won't hurt, but the method of follow up can make all the difference. This site is currently focused on hotels and reaches into other areas of tourism.
4. Hotels, resorts and conference centers can upgrade to a Tripadvisor Business listing which enables a hotelier to include the hotel's telephone number, URL and email on a search results page. On the hotel's sub-page, users can check rates and availability at the property with one click. This feature costs money but ROI can be tracked through bookings and Google Analytics.
5. If you want to connect with other businesses and share your client base, you can “friend” them and send a complimentary note. This will create goodwill amongst your fellow businesses, and perhaps encourage that business owner to recommend your services to others.
6. [Climb the Creative Ladder]: Business owners may commission third parties to produce virtual tours (for a fee) and post these videos on the Tripadvisor site free of charge.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

*Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center
Tarrytown House Estate and Conference Center*

MEMBER

Kasey Sanders, Hamilton Park Hotel & Conference Center

WEBINARS



DESCRIPTION

Webinars are online presentations in the form of a lecture, discussion or workshop. The content is transmitted with video or text slides, a voice-over and often a Q&A session at the end. Users can log-in via a computer to view the session and call into a toll-free number to listen to the presentation.

TARGET MARKET

Meeting and/or event planners, conference organizers, prospective and current clients, other conference center professionals, and vendors.

OBJECTIVE

To serve as an educational resource and offer insight on a subject in a modern and engaging way.

HOW TO START

Poll your clients and social media audience to see if they would have an interest in webinars or if they would be interested in participating in a webinar hosted by your conference center. If it's determined that it may be a success, brainstorm the mission, objective, some topics, the registration process and if there will be a nominal fee. Find a solution to host the webinar whether it's video-conferencing like TinyChat or it's an actual third-party webinar hosting service.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Run through a rehearsal with the speaker prior to the live webinar. Record it and let the speakers replay it later to hear how they sound with possible adjustments.
2. Leave more time for Q&A throughout the webinar and at the end. Q&A possibilities include video-conferencing, conference-call, text messaging, tweets or live chat room. Attendees will be more pleased knowing all their questions were answered.
3. Begin promoting the webinar well in advance but be sure to reach them through email, social media, a separate event website and at professional industry events.
4. Create presentations that engage the audience with graphics and dynamic elements. The images must always be compelling to grab the attendee's attention and keep it. To interact with the audience, offer polls during the session.
5. Mondays and Fridays should be avoided when choosing dates to host webinars. Start the webinar 15 minutes after the scheduled time to accommodate late-comers and times like 10 AM and 2 PM are optimal when most people are at their desk.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

International Association of Conference Centers Webinar Series

MEMBER

Sarah Vining, National Conference Center

SKYPE AND TINYCHAT



DESCRIPTION

Skype and Tiny Chat are both free video chats. Skype is a software application that can be used from a smartphone or computer with internet connection. Tiny Chat is a video chat room for up to 16 users at once.

TARGET MARKET

Colleagues, vendors, planners or other potential business contacts.

OBJECTIVE

To host a meeting that is modern, develops an interpersonal relationship and is often more efficient. It also allows for facial expressions and more interaction that isn't developed through phone or email.

HOW TO START

Start by creating a professional user name on either Skype or Tinchat.com and complete the information in the fields provided. Log-in using the created username and password to personalize your account by adding a picture and location. Search for contacts by entering in the information of the person you're searching (or on TinyChat click "Start Broadcasting" to invite friends from your other social networking accounts) and request to add them to your contact list. Click on contacts in your list to request a video call, voice call (labeled "call"), or chat (to send messages to other users).

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Share ideas with clients, meet new team members, or have speakers present from a satellite location through a video call.
2. Record a blog interview on Skype, often referred to as a "vlog" (video-blog). After the interview session, edit the clips through YouTube, Adobe Elements, Windows Movie Maker or Apple iMovie.
3. Host a video chat room for a client where everyone can collectively come together and discuss the event beforehand, such as off-site planner, client, decor vendors, DJs, and so forth.
4. Always check your surroundings before going live with anyone. Ensure there is enough lighting and the space is free of distracting noise and clutter like stacked papers.
5. TinyChat is an inexpensive way to host a webinar as a conference center or utilize with events at conference centers. Speakers presenting from a satellite location or participating virtual in a panel discussion can use Tinchat, but registered users must be fewer than 100 attendees.
6. [Climb the Creative Ladder]: Host a virtual tweet-up by hosting a chatroom with social media pals you'd like to meet. It's a great way to connect with fans of the venue and further build a relationship.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Northern Illinois University Conference Centers has a small office set up for clients to use Skype, which is a contemporary take on the phone booth. [Skype](#)
International Association of Conference Centers, Emerging Trends Committee continues to attempt interesting ways to turn a normal conference call for an interactive session. [TinyChat](#)

MEMBER

Purvi Bhatt, R. David Thomas Executive Conference Center

ONLINE COMMUNITY / EVENT COMMUNITY

DESCRIPTION

A website that is considered a virtual community for individuals with the same interests, within similar professional industries or who have the same area of expertise. An event community is another type of online community that brings attendees together before, during and after an event for networking, appointments and discussion through its website.

TARGET MARKET

Meeting and/or event planners, conference organizers, clients, attendees, industry professionals, vendors, general meetings and conference industry.

OBJECTIVE

To communicate and network with professionals within the same online community. Communication includes commenting and conversing on blogs, articles, bulletin boards, forums, chat-rooms, webinars, moving the friendship to other social networks like connecting on LinkedIn, scheduled Twitter chats and the Facebook fan page.

HOW TO START

Reach out to meeting planners and clients who are active on social media to see what online communities they're a part of such as Engage365 <http://engage365.org>. Choose an online community that best fits your interests and goals. A majority of online communities are free. Once you have been invited or created your account, upload an avatar (photo) and create a bio for yourself.

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. Become active on the online communities website by commenting on the blog posts and bulletin boards with insightful feedback.
2. For those with writing or blogging skills, take a pro-active role and look into freelancing for the site; paid or un-paid, it's good exposure for the conference center.
3. Join or host a chat for the users on Twitter. Weekly chats around a topic allow users to come together. Use this opportunity to your advantage.
4. Occasionally, the online community may host a meet-up. If members are planning a meet-up in your city or a destination for a tradeshow or conference, it's a good way to build connections. Often these individuals are looking for a donated venue which is valuable exposure for the conference center.
5. Visit the site on a daily basis and promote the newly published blog posts and articles to your social media channels.
6. [Climb the Creative Ladder]: Offer to host a how-to webinar to the online community on a topic that interests the community. Your conference center will stand apart in the industry.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

International Association of Conference Centers utilized JuJaMa, an online software platform to help bring the event community of the 2012 Annual Conference together through its customized social network platform. [Jujama](#)

MEMBER

Sarah Vining, National Conference Center

MOBILE APPS AND MOBILE SITES



DESCRIPTION

Mobile apps and mobile websites are both software designed to help a user to perform specific tasks on a smartphone so it's more easily processed and viewer friendly.

TARGET MARKET

Guests, attendees, meeting planners, event planners and conference organizers.

OBJECTIVE

To provide a simpler and more engaged experience for those on the go, which includes a conference center app with relevant information for guests, game apps for attendees, meeting apps with conference material and agenda or the conference center's website condensed and configured for a mobile device.

HOW TO START

Determine the specific needs of your mobile visitor and aim at the most important information or tasks that the visitor performs. For conference visitors, we can be sure that they will be interested in the "who, what, where and when" information of the conference. Start by analyzing your website's statistics and study the behavior of your current mobile visitors. What are their top destination pages? What are they looking for? This step is critical to gain deep understanding. Then, understand the objectives of your mobile implementation: which direct needs are we going to service, and which we will not. What are the desired results? It's key to keep things as simple as possible. Focus on the direct needs of the visitor, everything else is superfluous. Then choose the mobile app agency or solution that best fits your conference center's needs.

QUOTE: "Mobile is the art of reducing things to the essence."

TOP 5 BEST PRACTICES (advice)

1. With HTML5 technology you are able to develop mobile-friendly websites at a fraction of the costs compared to the so called 'native apps'. Responsive web design is a web-building technique that allows you to create 'fluid' websites that adapt to the type of device you're browsing on.
2. Conduct some research to find out which devices are common for your particular target population. In general, iPhone, Android and Blackberry phones account for the vast majority of the mobile phone market.
3. Technical implementation depends largely on your budget, your wishes and your target population. With mobile development, the sky is the limit. You can choose to aim at a mobile website or develop a specific piece of software for a specific type of phone (so-called native app).
4. It is important to help your visitors solve their problems. Don't try to be hip, try to serve your customer. Your current web design agency should be aware of the possibilities and limitations of creating a mobile version of the current website. Regarding creating a highly specialized app for your conference center, there are different solutions in the market from a fully custom build solutions to a self-service platform like Twoppy.
5. Find a way to provide free Wi-Fi in public space so the app can be utilized most effectively. For a fast growing number of people, internet access has become a basic need. Not providing free Wi-Fi at your venue can be one of the key issues to get your venue off an event planner's shortlist.

MEMBERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

*Doral Arowwood
The Conference Center at the Georgian Terrace Hotel
Conference Center at Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel
Hyatt Hotels
Lied Lodge and Conference Center*

MEMBER

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