

SOCIAL MEDIA

TOOLS, APPLICATIONS & MEASUREMENTS FOR THE CORPORATE TRAVEL INDUSTRY



Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Which social media tools is Topaz International currently utilizing and how are they beneficial?	2
Facebook	2
Twitter	5
LinkedIn	8
TypePad (blogging)	9
Which social media tools are accessible and beneficial that Topaz International currently does not utilize?	12
Youtube	12
Newsfeeds	13
What can businesses in the travel industry ultimately use social media sites for?	14
How can businesses measure social media's effectiveness?	15
Leading the world towards your virtual door step: The "Top 10 Rules for Social Media"	16
Social Media — Additional Statistics	17
Summary	18
Works Cited	19

Introduction

There has never been a better time to utilize the free tools of the internet for marketing known as “Social Media.”

Social media allows businesses to explain their product or service, discuss industry news, provides networking capabilities, displays pictures and videos, is a research enabler, and more. All of these are tools that help a business get its message out to its customers and those that may have never heard of their business.

The corporate travel industry is an industry which can truly benefit from the use of social media. The travel industry is going through some of the most significant changes it has faced in decades. Communicating the message of these changes and a company’s role in addressing them is more important than ever before. Targeting those who travel has never been easier with the use of internet marketing. Using social media in the travel industry is simple, low cost, and essential.

This e-book introduces many different social media sites which are easy to use and that businesses in the corporate travel industry can benefit from. It also discusses the golden rules of social media use, ways to measure your social media participation, and the statistics about current social media use.

Which social media tools is Topaz International currently utilizing and how are they beneficial?

facebook

Facebook is a social media tool which can be used for personal or business uses.

Facebook began as a personal tool used to connect college students to one another. However, as the “Facebooking” world quickly grew, founder Mark Zuckerberg began to realize he was cutting out a large part of his market by only allowing college students to use Facebook. The site was quickly opened up to anyone with a valid email address. This caused a generational shift in the user base and quickly college students were cringing at their dad’s Facebook request, their mom’s profile picture, and their grandmother’s uncanny ability to “poke” them every day. Whichever way you look at it, Facebook has created a social community where people keep in touch with one another by sharing photos, writing on each others walls, sending each other virtual invitations, updating their statuses and much more.

Once social media started to become a place for businesses to create communities, Facebook followed suit. It came out with a way for people to make “business pages” where they could post company information, have contests, hold discussions, hear from customers and more. Facebook created a feature which allowed businesses to make a “page” for themselves. People had to become “fans” instead of “friends” of certain businesses. This is where Facebook may have missed the opportunity to help businesses grow. Clients of businesses rarely think of themselves as “fans.” Being a fan involves a “fanatic” attitude towards something, and an effort to support it. Sorry, but the last time I was a “fan” of a business it was a baseball franchise

called the Boston Red Sox. So, will I become a fan of the “Boston Red Sox” business Facebook page? Of course. Will I become a “fan” of the local grocery store down the road? Probably not. Also, let’s be honest, once I become a fan of the Boston Red Sox Facebook page, it has given me no reason to ever look at it again. I have “become a fan” and done my duty. There is way too much effort in searching out the page again and checking in to what the Boston Red Sox may have added today or tomorrow. I have no incentive to return.

“People aren’t addicted to Facebook, they are addicted to their friends.”

With that said, we must bring to light the unbelievably powerful social connections Facebook presents. It has created an area for people to connect on a daily basis. By allowing its members to write on each others walls and “tag” each other in photos, Facebook users connect with people, while sharing their own life with them at the same time. A friend once said, “People aren’t addicted to Facebook, they are addicted to their friends.”

With this said, Topaz has utilized Facebook, but kept it personal. A business page was not created, but personal pages within the company are maintained. The connections that can be established through a personal page of team members such as the CEO of Topaz International, Brad Seitz, are endless, especially in the travel industry where connections are more important than ever. If you are part of the travel industry, you are most likely always on the go. So how do we stay in touch with those who travel? Social media, such as Facebook. While Brad may not be creating “fans,” he is creating connections, a community, and networking. “Your friends are from all your life experiences,” noted Brad. “And Facebook allows me to keep connected to them.”

In the end there is no denying the stunning statistics Facebook has achieved. According to their “Press Room,” the following should help those who do not understand its impact on our society as a whole:

STATISTICS

General Growth

- More than 250 million active users
- More than 120 million users log on to Facebook at least once each day
- More than two-thirds of Facebook users are outside of college
- The fastest growing demographic is those 35 years old and older

User Engagement

- Average user has 120 friends on the site
- More than 5 billion minutes are spent on Facebook each day (worldwide)
- More than 30 million users update their statuses at least once each day
- More than 8 million users become fans of pages each day

Applications

- More than 1 billion photos uploaded to the site each month
- More than 10 million videos uploaded each month
- More than 1 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photos, etc.) shared each week
- More than 2.5 million events created each month
- More than 45 million active user groups exist on the site

International Growth

- More than 50 translations available on the site, with more than 40 in development
- About 70% of Facebook users are outside the United States

Platform

- More than one million developers and entrepreneurs from more than 180 countries
- Every month, more than 70% of Facebook users engage with platform applications
- More than 350,000 active applications currently on Facebook platform
- More than 200 applications have more than one million monthly active users
- More than 15,000 websites, devices and applications have implemented Facebook Connect since its general availability in December 2008

Mobile

- There are more than 30 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices
- People that use Facebook on their mobile devices are almost 50% more active on Facebook than non-mobile users
- There are more than 150 mobile operators in 50 countries working to deploy and promote Facebook mobile products



Twitter..ahhh..If only I could explain Twitter in 140 characters or less.

Twitter, in 140 characters or less, allows its users to post whatever they feel they want to express at the moment.

I guess it was built for people like me, who sometimes feel the need to express myself in novel form, forgetting that two sentences could sum things up. In a sense, Twitter co-founders Evan Williams and Biz Stone have created a micro-blog. Some people use their Twitter to update people about what they're doing, but more importantly most answer the question of what has their attention at the moment. People are frequently inspired by fellow "tweeters" and re-post, or "retweet" their information. Twitter allows users to search certain names or categories to find people and decide if they want to "follow them," otherwise known as receiving their updates on their wall. Often this causes a chain reaction and the other "Twitter.er" follows them back. One of the most important features of Twitter is that everything can be found in one simple spot. You can see all of your friends "tweets" just by scrolling down on one screen. Everything on Twitter is also chronologically ordered for you, so there is no seeking out who has updated recently and who has not. Tweets are short and sweet. Well...not always sweet...but definitely short. Twitter's most important feature is its ability to allow people to transmit time sensitive information. People can update anywhere, anytime. In fact, Twitter was the first place the US Airways crash on the Hudson River was reported. Since then many major world events have been posted on Twitter before any news station has broadcasted the story.



While Twitter is growing tremendously, some question its ability to keep up with demand. The famous “fail whale” icon lets people know “twitter is down and will be back momentarily.” However, on August 6th, 2009 Twitter was “attacked”, was down for hours, and caused quite the uproar. Many people question Twitter’s technical capabilities, but the statistics speak for themselves: According to the Web monitoring company Pingdom, that was Twitter's first outage of more than 5 minutes duration. Over the past six months, the site has had an uptime record of 99.8%.

Follow Brad Seitz on Twitter:
<http://twitter.com/bseitz63>

Twitter is a social media tool Topaz has taken advantage of from a business and personal perspective. CEO Brad Seitz maintains a twitter page where his “followers” can find everything from industry information and travel tips to sports updates and tid bits about his personal life. Brad utilizes Twitter as a tool to get others thinking about the industry, connect his followers, as well as learn from the people he follows. Twitter allows Brad to see a wide range of perspectives on one screen. He can choose what he feels is more important or interesting and “retweet” this information in his own tweets. Twitter is an application that is truly beneficial to those in the travel industry because it is compatible with those on the move. You can tweet from your lap top or your phone. If you don’t have time to write a blog, feel free to tweet in 140 characters what’s on your mind at the moment. Brad is also able to link people to his blog by tweeting an intriguing sentence about his blog topic and putting a hyperlink into his tweet. Twitter has given Topaz the opportunity to lead their followers to other forms of social media and marketing, such as their

blog, LinkedIn, and webpage. Topaz has also chosen to have a custom background on Twitter with a photo of CEO Brad Seitz, and links to other Topaz social media. This helps followers put a name to a face and get a more realistic and total image of the person behind the tweets, as well as quickly navigate to places they can find out more about Topaz. Topaz's background on twitter is also fully integrated with their website and other marketing materials so that a sense of branding exists within their Twitter page.

TWITTER STATISTICS THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW:

(According to pluggd.in.com)

- 72.5% of all users joined during the first five months of 2009
- 85.3% of all twitter users post less than one update per day
- 21% of users have never posted a Tweet
- 5% of Twitter users account for 75% of all activity
- More than 50% of all updates are published using tools, mobile and Web-based, other than Twitter.com.
- There are more women on Twitter than men (53% vs 47%), though when it comes to activity, males (54%) outnumber females (46%)
- Of the people who identify themselves as marketers, 15% follow more than 200 people



LinkedIn is a business networking social media site that focuses less on the personal activities, such as Facebook, and is much more in depth than Twitter.

The primary goal of LinkedIn is for users to create profiles and connections. On their profiles people display their previous and current work experience and education. You have the option to load a resume, a picture, receive recommendations from current co-workers or employers, and connect with others in your same network. LinkedIn is meant for those looking to network and create “connections” to potentially get or change jobs, or those looking to hire. Connections can range from “direct connections to second degree connections,” and onward. However, it is a great resource to be a part of even if you are doing neither, because we all never know when we will need to network with those who provide better business opportunities.

Brad Seitz on LinkedIn:

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/bradtopaz>

Topaz’s management team has been utilizing LinkedIn by each having their own personal pages. Through these pages Topaz can connect with others in their industry, connect with potential hires, and recommend their current employees.

Topaz’s LinkedIn can help others in their industry and potential clients get a clearer look at the management team’s educational and business backgrounds. It also provides a picture of the employee. People can view the recommendations others have given of the Topaz team to understand the team members more thoroughly through those that have done business with them. Topaz uses LinkedIn to post their travel schedule, event schedule, and reading lists. Topaz’s LinkedIn also connects to their Twitter site and displays their tweets. LinkedIn is a more professionally-based social media tool, which Topaz uses to connect with those they feel are an important part of their network now or in the future.

STATISTICS

- Founded in December 2002 and launched in May 2003 mainly used for professional networking.
- As of July 2009, it had more than 43 million registered users spanning 170 industries.



Remember the old days of having a diary, a journal, a pencil, or a pen and thoughts swirling through your head you just had to get down on paper? Put a keyboard underneath your fingers and your own personal online space on the computer screen in front of you, and you have a web log (“blog”). (Well, that and the millions of other people that now read your once personal journal). But hey, that’s the new generation right? People knowing what you’re thinking and you wanting them to know, that is where the virtual world has gone.

The difference between a blog and most other social media sites today is that a blog is meant for you to be able to spill what you’re thinking or what has your attention in more than a “wall post” or a “140 character tweet.” Your Twitter or LinkedIn page will intrigue people and send them to your blog where they expect to learn more. A blog gives you the opportunity to take that latest tweet a little further. When you’re finally done running through the airport tweeting, “late for my flight” and your sitting on a cobblestone street in San Diego drinking a martini, people watching...now’s the time to get settled into your blog. Now is the time to tell people exactly what you meant by your tweet from earlier in the day, “Rudest flight attendant in the world.” You know you want to say more...so get typing.

Topaz’s choice for a blog space just happens to be the blogging site “TypePad,” where they pay a minimal monthly fee. There are many more to choose from ranging from blogger.com, blogspot.com, wordpress.com, and more. The Topaz blog is written by CEO Brad Seitz. Brad’s topics most often include current happenings in the industry, Topaz research, explanations of his company’s core beliefs and values, and a synopsis of the places Brad has

Brad Seitz on TypePad:
<http://bradseitz.typepad.com>

traveled. Brad's blog entices readers to come back and read more, not by trying to sell them his service, but by giving them something interesting to read. Brad has quickly learned selling a service does not make people want to return to your blog. Brad gives people insight into his experiences, tips, ask for questions and opinions, and shares his general knowledge, as well as well thought-out research and articles. Topaz also often shares the information and surveys that other businesses have completed, besides themselves. The main goal of the Topaz blog is clearly to spread knowledge, experience, and stories. People will trust you more, understand you better, and be more apt to think of you when the time comes to need your services if you take the route of upholding an intriguing blog, which Topaz has.

Blogging is an especially interesting tool for those in the travel industry. It seems the average traveler always has a story to tell. Whether that story is about the fabulous customer service they received at the latest hotel they stayed in, or the worst airline experience they have ever had, there is always something to elaborate on. Blogs not only allow the writer to share their experience in detail, but often attract the attention of those they are blogging about. Since a blogger is often not a promoter, people seem to trust their opinions more and companies take them more seriously; sometimes even more seriously than the main stream media. As CNN reports, "Blogging has a sense of authority and authenticity that other media doesn't have," says Rebecca Goldberg, a hotel design expert and editor-in-chief of *Boutique Design* magazine. She's been tracking the influence of bloggers on the hotel industry, and says it grows with each year. Other travelers — particularly those booking their hotels online — feel that blogs are more believable than

what they read in a newspaper or watch on TV." "If I read something in a blog she says, "it reads more like advice and less like a promotion for the hotel." As part of the travel industry, it is essential to share your stories and spread your thoughts. People want to know what the average person thinks of a certain destination, and if you can tell them and support your thoughts, most likely you have just attracted someone interested in reading what else you have to say.

BLOG STATISTICS:

- New blog every 1/2 of a second
- 175,000 new blogs each day
- English blogs — 39%
- Japanese blogs — 31%
- Chinese blogs — 12%
- Posts per day — 1.6 million
- 8% of all new blogs are spam ("splogs")

ADDITIONAL TRAVEL BLOGS:

- thebeat.travel/blog
- boardingarea.com/blogs
- travel.alltop.com

Which social media tools are accessible and beneficial that Topaz International currently does not utilize?



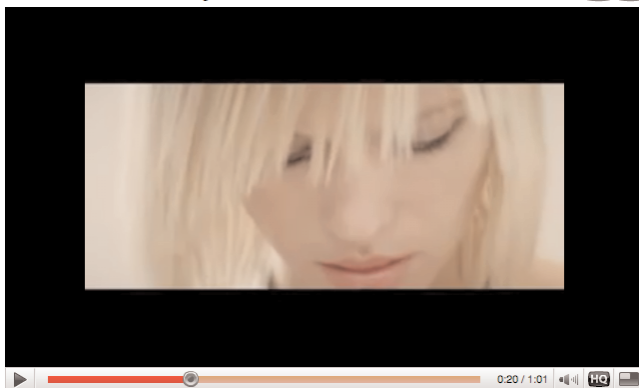
We all have that one or many Youtube videos saved under our favorites that we got in an email, saw on the web or on the news. Many of the videos started as very simple experiences which happened to be caught on tape, were posted on Youtube for family and friends and exploded into national, sometimes international sensations. Two of the recent examples that come to mind are "Charlie Bit My Finger" which currently has over 131 million views. And "David After the Dentist" Which has over 34 million views. Both became popular simply because of the humor of the children's reactions and voices. Due to reactions to these videos, some of the people in them are now on TV and famous, and apparel is being sold

representing these video themes. Bottomline: With the help of Youtube you have the possibility of turning a simple moment into quite a craze. Imagine the challenge of selling toilets to commercial builders? And then try to make a video from it. Check this out: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaHtA89RHUQ>). So why not take the chance and put a video up that will attract people's attention, ultimately attracting attention to your company?

STATISTICS

- Started by the founder of paypal.com.
- Now owned by Google.
- Youtube drew 5 billion video views in July 2008.
- 85 million unique visitors in September 2009.
- 478 million visited in September 2009.
- Fifth most visited website.

CWS Commercial "Say no to dirt"





Newsfeeds are new RSS tools that people and businesses are using to save them time, one of our most valuable resources.

Newsfeeds help people discover the news that is important to them and also help them find it quickly and in an orderly fashion. People no longer have to read through things they are uninterested in to get to those they care most about. Two of the sites most often used for newsfeeds are “Delicious” and “StumbleUpon.”

Delicious is a social bookmarking site where articles receiving the most attention are displayed as “fresh and popular bookmarks.” Delicious also displays tweets related to the topic, linking you to other topics similar to the one you are reading about. You can decide which articles and information you find most important and bookmark them yourself.

“StumbleUpon” helps you find the best of the web. It allows its users to rank certain websites on their quality. Instead of using a search engine people can now quickly “StumbleUpon” information their friends and other “like-minded” users suggested match their interests. Members help rank pages so that low-quality sites can be weeded out. StumbleUpon helps its users come across many different sites related to their interests, they may not have found before using a search engine.

Topaz currently utilizes sites such as Delicious and StumbleUpon. When searching for industry information, using newsfeeds can save someone in the travel industry a large amount of time. The travel industry is such a large industry that there are many different topics it is composed of. Newsfeeds can help people sort through information, bookmark it, and focus their discussion, pin pointing what they feel is most important. These sites also give people in the industry a chance to connect and share information they feel is useful and interesting.

What can businesses in the travel industry ultimately use social media sites for?

- Transmitting time sensitive information
- Positioning your company as a thought leader
- Research enabler
- Choosing a few initiatives that work well for you and sticking to them
- Sharing industry knowledge
- Getting to know the wisdom/preferences of your customers
- Helping customers to help customers
- Building a community around your services
- Advocacy forum
- PR support
- Creating client trust
- Improving the travel industry
- Spending little money for a lot of advertising
- Giving your client an idea of your personality/attitude/values
- Lead generation/sales retention
- Providing an alternative forum for comments
- Commerce support
- Brand improvement/strength
- Starting conversations
- Get your audience excited: "People want participation not propaganda."
- Reputation management

How can businesses measure social media's effectiveness?

- Do you have an end goal for your social media participation?
- How many people ask you about your company through your social networks?
- How many of your clients name social networks as a referral? Do you currently ask this question to new clients?
- How do you incorporate your company into social networks without boring people?
- Are your current marketing strategies integrated with your social networks? (Website, commercial, magazine advertisement). If no, where is the disconnect?
- Has your social network become a hobby, rather than a free way to market and increase profit?
- How often do you update your social network and what percentage is personal versus business related?
- How many people do you have working on your social networks?
- Does everyone in your company understand what social networking sites you are part of and what your goal is for each of them?
- What is different about your networks versus your competitors?
- Where are you advertising your social networks to those not involved? How simple are you making their involvement?
- What do your social networks offer potential customers?
- Are you linking your social network sites only to one another or have you expanded to advertising them through your website and marketing material?
- Are you writing about something worth reading about by your target market?
- Do you know how to tap the line without crossing it?
- Are the people following you helping you to gain knowledge, potential clients, or potential referrals?
- Would you be willing to put links in all your marketing to social media sites or do you hide out in a virtual world and only feel comfortable sharing your "virtual self" with other "virtual beings?"
- Do you understand your target audience?
- Are you articulating, solving, or addressing your target audiences main problems and interests?
- Are you asking your "responders" how they learned about your social media site?

Leading the world towards your virtual door step: The “Top 10 Rules for Social Media”

1. Don't sell your products or services. People want you to point out interesting things in your space, not just about you. Give them what they want and they will keep reading, which is after all...your ultimate goal. "People want participation not propaganda."
2. Always take part in the conversation. This especially includes responding to negative remarks in a positive way. You have to monitor what is being said, at all times.
3. Content, content, content.
4. Not only know WHO your customers are, but understand their wants and needs.
5. Always be looking for ways to reach out to those who are reaching out to you.
6. Create trust.
7. "Follow hunches even though you can't necessarily justify them or know where they're gonna go." — Evan Williams
8. Ask questions. Use social media to get valuable opinions from your clients.
9. Have a goal and stick to it.
10. Always have metrics which you measure the impact of your social media and don't be afraid to adapt and overcome.

Social Media — Additional Statistics

- 93% of Americans believe that a company should have a presence on social media sites and 85% believe that these companies should use these services to interact with consumers.
- Each adult with a social network profile or page has a presence on 1.6 sites.
- Estimate of 272,000,000 social network users worldwide.
- 54% of 16–24 year olds have social media profiles, however that percentage decreases with age

Business-to-Business Companies:

- 90% participate in video
- 80% participate in blogs
- 69% participate in social networks
- 69% of business-to-business buyers use social networks “primarily for business networking and development.”

GOOD SOURCES OF STATISTICS:

- socialmediastatistics.wikidot.com
- compete.com

Summary

Social media is transforming the way we interact with each other on a social and business level. The instant gratification and numerous connections give businesses the power to spread their message further and faster than ever before. Social media costs little and gives business extensive marketing opportunities. Those in the corporate travel industry can especially benefit from the use of social media because we are faced with a time when people's opinions and emotions are skyrocketing due to the changes in travel. We must communicate these feelings and educate each other about the realities of travel to reorganize and reinforce an industry once largely backed by public support and positive connotations. Participating in social media should be a goal for anyone in the travel industry who wants to create a new transparency for their business and help improve the industry by invoking the passion and image it once conveyed to the average consumer.

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ABOUT THIS EBOOK AND TOPAZ INTERNATIONAL

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For more information about Topaz International, the global leader in providing airfare audit, internet audit, GDS audit and other business travel solutions to travel managers and travel procurement professionals all over the world, please

Call: 503-651-4300

Email: brad.seitz@etopaz.com

Web: www.etopaz.com