

Why tour operators need to take Facebook seriously

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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 meetings, 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

- ❖ All the tour operators surveyed were in the business for more than a year
- ❖ The tour operators were large in size, with a large number of itineraries offered to groups of people between 6 to 50
- ❖ 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 panning 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?
- ❖ 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?
- ❖ 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*.
- ❖ 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.

About the author: Avijit Arya is the founder and CEO of Internet Moguls, a full service digital media marketing & consulting company with a strong hold in travel, tourism and hotel industry.

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