

## Social Media Highlights the Crucial Role of "Tech for Touch" in Modern Hospitality

By [Ken Parish](#), Director of E-Commerce / Sales Support, McNeill Hotel Company | February 13, 2022



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What use can we make of social media? A great deal if we exercise a sound, verifiable sales and marketing strategy; carefully execute that strategy and watch out for the inevitable speed bumps or potholes that may appear along the way.

Today's Internet-driven world of social media in all its forms has become a critical pathway to connecting with guests in today's world of hospitality sales and marketing and guest engagement. The connections may be technology-driven and virtual, but the established relationships and impact are real.

The bottom line to our participation with social media has become clear-cut. This is where our guests and core user groups engage

with each other; where they look for information about potential travel, group events and activities from education and health care to recreation, entertainment and sporting events; and where they spend substantial time each day. Thus, we must have a meaningful presence on social media to inform, attract and, as necessary, respond to our target audiences. Overall, social media and digital marketing tools provide adaptability with the consumer regarding search and engagement.

The novel coronavirus pandemic has only accelerated or highlighted ongoing sales and marketing strategies, as sales teams have been unable to canvas office buildings or make in-person visits to potential user groups as in the past. We'll get back to that again one day. For now, in addition to our social media web presence, personalized e-visits and lively videos are doing a great job of showcasing our properties to potential guests.

In this article, we will review the expanding opportunities to effectively employ social media for hospitality sales and marketing; ways in which we can engage with existing and potential guests; some important safeguards when conducting sales and marketing through social media; and the development of our organization's own sales and marketing culture to support these efforts.

### Choosing Channels

As noted earlier, today's consumer wants to engage through the Internet, whether it's web searches; general or specialist "review" sites like Google, Yelp or Tripadvisor; or specific social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. Don't worry, TikTok or LinkedIn, we haven't forgotten you.

In this Age of Multitasking, cautions do apply. The Internet and social media have so many tempting attractions. It's easy to get distracted, flit from site to site, sometimes, it seems like even an old-fashioned TV remote control wouldn't be quick enough. Moreover, there are many sites, or pages within sites, open to irresponsible conversations, those proverbial rabbit holes of innuendo and controversy.

As a result, in our experience, it is important to take the time to carefully research prospective social media sites where you might conduct sales and marketing campaigns. Study the traffic analytics and, further, test both individual platforms, as well as specific "campaigns" within a given site. Also, understand your goals, which can include general campaigns to build awareness for a property; what could be called affinity campaigns, where we identify with individual sporting, recreational or entertainment events or venues, charitable causes or area organization like a Chamber of Commerce or Travel and Tourism Bureau; or targeted, time-specific advertising buys.

For example, a consistent marketing message and sales effort imply a discrete focus on a limited number of platforms, the integrity of which is reinforced in some cases by brand requirements for regular posting intervals. We all know the big names in this arena, which includes Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Reddit; the list goes on. New social media platforms pop up almost daily; many quickly going in and out of fashion.

While it gets entangled in controversies at time, Facebook remains an extremely important platform for hospitality e-commerce. As

pointed out by Krista Neher in an [article for Forbes](#), Facebook has almost 3 billion users and the user numbers grow each month. Her recommendation: "Marketers should assume Facebook will continue to dominate."

Neher also emphasizes that marketers should focus on creating experiences at every stage of their interactions with customers to earn social media word-of-mouth; that many businesses are spread too thin across too many channels; and she suggests spending more time on providing an excellent user experience, as opposed to trying to outguess search engine optimization (SEO) algorithms.

We agree: content should be paramount, understanding that experiences are the new social currency. The photos, the information conveyed, the marketing "promise" must be accurate and on point, as we attempt to craft a narrative or experience that will be shared with family, friends, co-workers and the community at large.

Of this content, we can broadly distinguish between two kinds of promotional content: informational and targeted advertising. For example, for informational content, we can share heartfelt messages of employee celebrations, a community service project supported by a hotel team or positive guest service stories. These are some ways we can use social media to provide the "Tech for Touch." The goal is to develop a shared bond with our audience.

Social media can further be employed to market individual hotels packages, such as getaway weekends, group incentives, and promotional offers throughout the year. For example, running a Facebook promotion and targeting certain zip codes to a property's feeder cities can increase awareness of your property and build engagement from your followers. Individual ad buys can offer promotional rates or add-on amenities.

### **Important Rules of the Road**

From phishing email campaigns to ransomware, we are all well aware of the potential for abuse in today's connected world. Similarly, social media involvement comes with its own potential for malevolence related to various forms of security breaches, including taking over of accounts by stealing of passwords or other forms of intercepting communications.

To be set up for success on the Internet, hotels need to follow the security guidelines and procedures established by the individual social media platforms, as well as the major brands and their organization's internal marketing department and e-commerce departments. In addition to security of your web pages and scrutiny of the postings made on third party web pages, postings of relevant information and frequent postings are important to a successful Internet presence. In the case of Facebook, individual web pages, say, for a hotel property, are managed through the Facebook Business Suite. This platform allows entities to manage both Facebook and Instagram advertising in one place. Ads can be easily targeted to your audience, and you can easily track the performance of the ads.

After that, common sense applies. We need to keep our security and controversy antenna on at all times, to avoid suspicious web pages or promoted activities. Great local knowledge of your community, businesses, charitable groups, schools, etc. will be a great help in this regard.

The same cautions apply to the important area of responding to property reviews. Thankfully, there are services, including brand-sponsored ones, that "poll" the Internet and summarize all the reviews that are posted online about individual hotels properties, an otherwise almost impossible task even if we had the necessary resources to devote to it. Each hospitality organization will have its own review response policies, but we believe that it is important to respond to all reviews if possible. Unfavorable reviews should be responded to promptly in a mature manner that "closes the conversation" and restores, as much as possible, guest satisfaction.

But how do we gauge the effectiveness of our social media sales and marketing efforts? Great question. Fortunately, in addition to the analytics within platforms like Google and Facebook, there are a number of customer experience management (CXM) platforms to track customer behavior and feedback. These include the Medallia Experience Cloud and Sprinklr, a Unified-CXM platform used to market, advertise, research and engage customers. Not only can Sprinklr be used to monitor the platforms, it can be used to schedule posts for future dates. Many major brands encourage the usage of Sprinklr to monitor and schedule those posts for future dates.

For example, for a given reservation, we can determine what web page the customer visited before making the reservation; whether the reservation was made on a smart phone or desktop computer; whether it was made using a brand loyalty application or some other web portal; and so on.

### **Our Expanding Skill Sets**

The wealth of available and analyzed sales, marketing and guest behavior data we have today is staggering. But what will we look for in that data and how will we act on it? Thus, our first mission is to cultivate and train team members with the necessary skills and aptitudes, not just for conventional sales and marketing activities, but, also, social media.

This process starts with updated training that appreciates and understands our expanded sales and marketing toolbox. This pandemic era, where we cannot schedule as many face-to-face encounters, is the perfect time for enhanced sales training that emphasizes newer modes of sales communication like video conferencing, multimedia presentations, one-to-one enhanced video emails and social media techniques and etiquette.

Another useful strategy as you build your e-commerce and social media teams is to identify a social media leader or champion at each



property. That person will be responsible for a regular schedule of property-level social media placements and, also, keep team members abreast of the latest brand and organizational guidelines, as well as developments on individual social media sites. For example, at Pet Friendly hotels, posts related to this topic are valuable to drive engagement. Posts with a photo of a cute puppy are hard to resist.

Regardless, we must remember that the use of all this data that we now have at our fingertips relies on serving a coherent sales and marketing strategy and a meaningful, shared corporate culture. Only then can we master these new technologies and avoid going down those proverbial rabbit holes. Only then are we really achieving Tech for Touch.



Ms. Knop

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Mr. Parish

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[Extended Biography](#)

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