Research Paper Commerce

Social Media Channels Used by Hotels.

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ABSTRACT

It is not easy to please today's traveler. The technology is upgrading every minute and so are the options for the customers. Today hospitality has also become customized where everything is available just a click away. Gone are the days when travel used to meant to visit a place first and then search for a hotel and tourist places. Today's traveler first checks the details online and then decides. To keep the pace with technology and traveler hospitality industry is taking the social media way Social media is the big thing in today's world. With the whole world going on social media, it has opened a new medium of marketing for the firms. Hospitality sector in the past few years has adopted this new medium in a very positive way. In India now almost every five star hotel has presence on social networking sites and they have included this as an eminent part of their marketing strategy.

Social media as defined by oxford dictionary means websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social media marketing can generate highly targeted traffic while enabling you to communicate with your visitors and Social media marketing is defined by Cambridge dictionaries as methods for advertising products, services, or brands using the internet, by attracting the interest of groups of people who discuss them, make suggestions about them, etc. online

This paper aims at studying in detail the social media tools used by hotels for its marketing and presence. We will be studying the social media platforms available for five star hotels. We would analyze the most popular social medium platform used by the hotel. The paper would give insight to the internet medium used for correspondence and inclusion of social media marketing as a crucial part in the marketing strategy of the hotels.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

Marketing plays a very crucial role in customer centric industry like the hotel industry. It is very necessary for the hotels to keep themselves updated with the latest trends. Today the hotels are very much customer focused. They take out time to interact with the customers, to understand them and to provide them the experience they are expecting. Now even the feedback is not just taken on a piece of paper, the whole interaction has gone online now. In order to match the pace of today's customer and competition, hotels have included social media marketing as an important part of their marketing strategy. The hotel is understanding the today's customer and their needs and making their presence prominent on every social media that their current and prospective customers are using. First it is very important to understand the concept of social media marketing and the hotel industry.

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How it works. In a few words, social media are sites that are driven by a constantly updated and fresh content and fed by users as opposed to organized publishers. In social media we include three types of sites: - 1) The organizations website, which has all the detailed information about the organization, it's history, working etc., 2) The social networking sites, like facebook, twitter, instagram etc where the customers interact in an informal way, 3) The review sites – like tripadvisor, four square etc, where the customers give a feedback about their experience with the different hotels and the services provided. It is the hotel's decision to use the different available mediums for interaction.

The hotels have started adopting the social media marketing strategy as a part of their marketing strategy to increase their

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN HOTELS

Social media technology is mainly based on three medium: - web, mobile and cloud. In the last decade social media has emerged as one of the most important and influential tool in marketing. Hospitality sector has also adopted this tool with open hands and almost all the hotels irrespective of their star ranking are using this tool of marketing. Social media has changed the whole scenario of the hotel marketing; hotels now have to be very cautious in handling guest and especially their complaints because one bad experience can ruin their reputation badly. Few years back it was said that the most powerful marketing of hotel is the word of mouth of the customer but now thanks to social media it is the word of million mouths that affect the hotel business. In order to get positive results from such marketing, it is very essential for a hotel property to adopt proper and most suitable social media channels.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Therefore, it appears necessary to investigate the popular social media channels which can be used by the five star hotels and how are the helpful for the Hotel.

LIMITATIONS

With such wide range of online marketing channels present in the market it was difficult to identify most popular channels.

The research work in this field is still restricted so it was difficult to gather all the information.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- The study analyses the most popular social media channels used by a hotel property
- The study could also help the hotel to understand the importance of these channels.

MAIN OBJECTIVE:

Primary:

To identify the most widely used social media channels by the Hotel

Secondary:

- To assess the optimum use of the channel
- To offer the suggestions to the organization for improvement in online presence and marketing.

SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

Social media channels are the medium through which a hotel markets itself. There is numerous numbers of channels being used by the hotels to connect to the customers. The challenge here is to choose the right channel and use it wisely so that it benefits the most to the hotel. For this study the use of social media channels by the following hotels will be

TYPE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

Social media channels can be mainly classified into three categories:

- Company Website/Blog,
- Social Networking sites,
- Review Sites.

Company Website/Blog

This channel is the web page where the organization provides all information right from start up history to present day management, packages, rooms, facilities. This channel is most trusted as this is managed by the organization itself and contains all the detailed and latest information of the firm. It is most useful to provide the information about the hotel property to the customers and to offer packages and loyalty programs. As today's customer is more tech friendly and knowledgeable, it becomes a challenge for the hotel to constantly update the website/blog and respond to the customer's need. The hotels have changed a lot in terms of information and style of the website to engage the customer. They try to provide all the important information on the home page only for the ease of the customers. The hotel must use this channel wisely as the web page forms a great impression of the hotel on the existing as well as potential customers mind hence influencing the decision to stay at the hotel. The website should contain all the essential information on the home page especially that which is useful for the customer. The basic contents of a hotel website are: About the hotel, Facilities offered like rooms, restaurants, banquets, recreational activities, USP of the hotel, management, awards/achievements, local tourist attractions of the city, feedback option, reservation link, tariff information. Along with this the hotel property has also offered a separate option of social media, which contains the information of social media presence of the hotel. In order to connect to the customers in a better way, hotel websites also has small link with logo of their presence on different social media networks.

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are the medium through which the users interact over internet may it be on PC, laptop or mobile. The most popular sites are facebook, twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and the list is endless. In the last decade networking sites have gain immense popularity among people of all age groups. Today the life is dependent on social networking sites, everyone 24X7 are hooked to such channels. People share everything online like their happiness, sadness, likes, dislikes, experiences, grievances; the influence of such sites is so much that even if a person sneezing he shares it on social network. This channel is very lucrative for the hotel industry as they can easily connect with the customer. In this channel segment most hotels are using facebook, every hotel has its facebook page, twitter account, pinterest, foursquare, Instagram. Social networking sites provide an easy platform for interaction with the customer's. It is very essential for a hotel to operate on the social network very cautiously as one bad comment or inappropriate language can lead to loss of many customer's not just one. These are open forums where the if the customer wants, he/she will share the experience on the hotel's personal account or page. The hotel should respond to comments in a tactfully way. This medium is also very useful for the organization as the hotel can easily reach to its customers about new offerings, upcoming events, promotional offers etc. This is the most easiest and direct way to connect to the customer. Before the emergence of social media, it was very difficult for the hotel to connect to the customer and advertise. These channels have helped hotels build a strong customer base, both existing and potential. The hotels can easily track their popularity through options like number of likes, followers, shares on social networking sites. A hotel if uses this medium appropriately can benefit a lot and increase the business.

Review Sites

Review sites are the portals where people share their experiences in the form of reviews, pictures, comments etc. In India famous hotel review sites are tripadvisor, trivago etc... The review sites help in increasing the customer base as now a person before traveling checks the review of the place and top hotels on the review sites and then decide the hotel for accommodation. Review sites also offer a comparative rate of the same hotel on different online travel agencies portal. These sites have reduced the effort of the customers to search for hotels at different portals. This channel is both a boom and bane for the hotels, as it is an open forum with no control of the hotel and people can post positive and negative comments about the hotel. The problem which the hotel faces is the difficulty to check the authenticity of the reviews especially the negative ones. At times the reviews are written by the rival hotel or somebody is playing prank. Whoever the person to post a negative remark or complaint, it becomes very important for the hotel to respond tactfully to the comments both positive and negative. The hotel should respond to each and every review in a professional manner. If handled correctly, this channel proves to be the channel that helps in growth of the hotel business.

CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE CHANNEL

- Look into each social media channel and determine which will work best for your business. Consider the following important factors with each: The product or service you are offering and the available human and financial resources at your disposal. Social media may be free, but think about the value of your time!
- Don't sign up for EVERY social media channel because they are new or popular kid on the block. Determine which is MOST relevant to your business. Rather be excellent with one or two channels than mediocre at five or six.
- Before deciding which social media channel to be active on, work out a clear and implementable plan. Many people lose their business focus while becoming social. It has a negative effective on the business due to the time lost trying to come to terms with social media. A plan really helps you to stay focused.
- Don't get frustrated. Stick with it. Social media takes time and an investment of your time over a sustained period in order to achieve results.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Research Design:

A Research Design is the arrangement of conditions for collections and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. The research is a basic descriptive research, defined

as attempts to explore and explain while providing additional information about a topic. This is where research is trying to describe what is happening in more detail, filling in the missing parts and expanding our understanding. This is also where as much information is collected as possible instead of making guesses or elaborate models to predict the future - the 'what' and 'how,' rather than the 'why.'

Sampling Method:
Census survey was adopted for the study. As it was census sampling, the entire population was taken for conducting the research. Hence no sampling tool/technique was used to choose the elements of the sample.

DATA SOURCE:
Primary Data:
The first hand primary data was collected through interviews with the hotel e- marketing staff. In addition to it discussions were held with the immediate supervisors, the managers of marketing department.

Secondary data
The secondary data was collected through the company profile, the company manuals, and previous year records.

ANALYSIS
From the above study it is known that in social media marketing has gained a lot of popularity in the marketing of hotel's and more important that are the social media channels adopted and appropriately using them. The most popular and effective channels available are: Websites, facebook, twitter accounts, tripadvisor, pinterest. A hotel must use a combination of these channel as dependency on one will lead to loss in the future as through that method major customer base will be left untouched. The other point to be kept in mind is the information to be floated on each portal. Limited and suitable information should be provided at different portals, if all have the same detailed information, it would result in lack of interest on customers point and hence will effect the business of the hotel. Third point to be kept in mind is the communication to be made with the customer. It is very important for the hotel to maintain a continuous relation with the customer both existing and potential as this communication through social media will make an impression on many hundreds of customers.

An important point to note here is that the property should know and choose wisely the channel to be adopted and to use it effectively.

CONCLUSION:
Social media can have both positive and negative impact not only smaller businesses but also on five star luxury hotels. Actions become necessary and timely response to the reviews when they are genuine can result in a big payoff. This becomes important when brand image is concerned. Many hospitality businesses have utilized social media beneficially. Whether the reviews were positive or negative, they have nicely responded to their advantage. With the rapidly changing technology it is impossible for any hospitality operator to ignore the social media. It should also be taken into consideration that it is just the beginning and nobody knows where it would lead us. This is one of the areas where there is need to focus on and develop theories and hypothesis which will benefit the rapidly growing hospitality industry.

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