



Role of social media in marketing with reference to tourism sector

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Abstract

Growth in number of internet users and use of mobile applications, along with advancement in information technology is offering abundant information in the virtual space. With the increase in number of jobs and income levels, people are showing inclination towards travel and tourism. As travelers and tourists seek instant information, gathering information online visiting websites, search engines, mobile app, e-commerce aggregators and social media has made information search easy. Ample information is available online which has also lead to problem of information overload. Travel & tourism service providers, in order to capture larger business and to build their brand, are doing marketing by providing travel deals online & through other digital medium which has affected business & industry. This research focuses on assessing the impact of digital marketing on travel & tourism industry. It helps in gaining an understanding on the level of impact created by digital marketing, its pros & cons, and provide suggestions for travel & tourism service providers to address relevant issues and challenges. The outcomes of the research can be used by E-Commerce aggregators, digital marketers, Mobile App service providers, social media marketers' and implementers of IT for tourism as a reference for digital marketing decisions.

Keywords: digital marketing, internet marketing, it for tourism, online bookings, social media marketing, travel & tourism, travel deals online

Introduction

The rise of the Internet and the ongoing evolution of digital marketing have a profound effect on the tourism industry to such an extent that it has become by far the most important tool for any travel and tourism business. At the same time, businesses need to realize that they have far less control than ever before, since consumer-generated content has become one of the most significant trends of all. Thanks to the global and highly accessible medium that is the modern Web, consumers are able to leave reviews, post comments on social media and spread word about their experiences to an extent that was never possible before. This trend is particularly important in the travel and tourism industry, due to the fact that more and more people are turning to the Internet to find everything from destination guides to restaurant and hotel reviews.

The Internet plays an important role not only during the planning stage of a holiday abroad, but also during the holiday itself. Due to high use of mobile devices in the last few years, consumers use their smart phones or tablet computers while exploring their destinations and seeking out local venues and travel tips. When they return home, they'll likely leave reviews on popular websites such as tripadvisor.com and on various major booking engines such as lastminute.com or booking.com. In order for travel companies to hold on to existing customers and attract new ones, they need to work tirelessly to build and preserve their reputations.

The travel industry in the context of digital marketing

The rapid development of the digital world has had a particularly strong impact on the tourism industry to such an extent that it has become a critical enabler for any business in this field. Understanding the main tourism drivers in the

areas that concern business is the most essential first step towards success. More traditional sources of information, such as fliers, guide books and the like still play a role, but the vast majority of content is now online, and in order to have any control over a brand's reputation and image, it is essential to maintain a constant presence online.

As an informational resource, the modern Web is usually the first place that people turn, not least because there are no physical or financial constraints dictating what consumers can publish. Fortunately, this fact also applies to businesses themselves, since they also have access to a huge range of publishing tools and different forms of marketing. Travel businesses can use the Web to build up a community whereby their customers share stories and provide invaluable feedback, while marketers themselves can make use of the more visual modern social networks to draw in a wider audience as well as nurture current customers.

Key digital marketing strategy for tourism industry

For a comprehensive approach to digital marketing inclusive of long-term and short-term perspectives, here are key digital marketing strategies that tourism industry can incorporate in business plan for driving traffic and higher ROI(Return on Investment).

- 1. Social Selling:** Identify the prospective customers and become a trustworthy source of information through multi-channel campaigns (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Google+). Facebook provides us with powerful insights to measure the social marketing performance and one in every 10 people on earth use Facebook. Ensuring that the hospitality industry has an optimized Facebook presence is essential to target new social guest.

2. **Content Marketing:** Create unique and relevant content to entice and engage the niche audience with different forms of content including articles, blogs, press release, newsletters, white papers, and social media post. Map your content to buying cycle with the appropriate content format. Develop a content calendar to schedule activities, defining your business objective. An effective content marketing plan will help to stay one step ahead of the crowd.
3. **Email Marketing:** Create a cross-channel brand promotion through Email campaign, communicating with the end-clients. Email Newsletter with short subject lines has the highest open rate as compared to the conventional approach. Ensure that the email newsletter contains click through to your website and offer a clear incentive to subscribe, which limit the chance of your newsletter getting delete
4. **Video Marketing:** Visual content (rich media and video) help to improve user experience. Free video hosting sites such as YouTube, Vimeo, Vevo, Veoh, Flickr, and Break helps to post short recordings of your restaurants/hotels with a variety of food and beverages to engage customer's attention. Sharing video is a great platform to demonstrate your expertise. Remember to include a call-to-action for customers to get in touch with you.
5. **Remarketing /Behavioral Targeting:** One of the most important aspects of digital marketing. It's a unique hotel marketing strategy to encourage online customers to visit again and make their booking. Retargeting service for hotel marketers' help to generate leads on their service page. Remarketing is a low-risk display option, boosting brand searches and site engagement.
6. **Mobile Hotel Marketing:** The hoteliers need to focus on two major aspects- how to promote their brand through mobile platform and how to connect with potential audience through smart phones and tablets. It's evident that Mobile Hotel Internet marketing plays an integral part in driving traffic and leads to your website.
7. **Mobile Ads:** Mobile Ads is a latest and innovative technique for Smartphone users to improve online presence. Create a mobile app listing all the features and services for customers to choose from. Mobile hotel website page enables customers to make their booking effortlessly.
8. **Search Engine Optimization:** For Hotel and Tourism industries, a professional SEO service is a must. The foundation of On-page activities involves page titles, headings, meta-tags whereas Off-page activities involve blogs, business / local listings, directory submission and social media.
9. **PPC Marketing:** Pay-per-Click marketing, also known as *Paid Search Marketing* helps to display your hotel/restaurant ad on the top of the search engine result page. A well-planned and executed PPC advertising campaign help to achieve the online hotel marketing goals, tracking conversion rate, monitoring your online competitors and better ROI.
10. **Hotel Web Marketing:** Online web hotel marketing presence is vital for the hospitality industry to gains a substantial percentage of its bookings. Create an online advertisement with simple hotel management budget target the online customers.

Review of Literature

S.K. Kuthiala Tourism and Hospitality Industry in India - Journal of Services Research, Volume 1, Number 1 (April-September, 2001) – To achieve rapid industrialization, need for advancements in the field of transportation and communication has become essential. Such advancements have led to start and growth of industries which has opened several job opportunities and has enhanced earning levels leading to increase in disposable income. People, to break from regular work, are showing interest in travelling & touring. India, with wider geographical diversity & culture, attracts people, thus offering tremendous potential for tourism.

Mohammad Amaan Khan - A broad view of prospects of tourism industry with reference to India - Pranjana Vol 17, No 2, Jul-Dec, 2014 - Use of internet plays a significant role in connecting tourism service providers and customers. Information technology is looked as a tool for marketing travel and tourism. It helps in creating information environment for tourism institution thus impacting tourism system.

UK Essays

Technology Has Significant Impact on the Travel Tourism Essay - Published: 23, March 2015 – Technology has an impact on the way business is operated. In the recent past, travel and tourism industry has progressed along with the development in technology. In short, technology has redefined the way tourism is managed. Communication technology has contributed towards promotion of destination, attracting tourists, enabling online reservations and payment systems. This has bridged gaps between the tourism service providers and the seekers. Tourists can access all kinds of information online, collate, compare and decide on their travel.

Professor Jennifer Rowley: The International Journal of Organizational Innovation Vol 8 Num 1 July 2015 – Digital marketing helps an organization to develop foresight and plan internet marketing activities and keep abreast with changing trends by offering customised services to the prospective customers.

Courtney L Vien: The future of marketing: Thriving in the digital world – Journal of Accountancy - June 1, 2015 - Use of digital marketing has introduced several changes and challenges in marketing strategies of organizations. There is a significant move where customers discover the firm, evaluate offerings, assess online instantaneously. Social media and content marketing complement each other by bringing in potential customers to business. With strong online presence, a firm can create their brand and impact target market.

Statistical Data: Tourism and digital marketing

- According to India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) the total contribution by travel and tourism sector to India's GDP is expected to increase from US\$ 136.3 billion in 2015 to US\$ 275.2 billion in 2025. Travel and tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner for India. It offers a diverse portfolio of niche tourism products - cruises, adventure, medical, wellness, sports, MICE, eco-tourism, film, rural and religious tourism. India has been recognized as a destination for spiritual tourism for domestic and international tourists. Travel & Indian

tourism Industry is growing at CAGR of 10.2%. (Source: Red Seer Consulting India OTA market advisory overview)

- According to www.w3trainingschool.com - Digital marketing industry achieved growth rate of 30% during 2015 and estimated growth for year 2016 is 40% and the fact is that the growth rate is going to grow further at a faster pace. Indian Internet population to reach half a billion by 2018 (Source: BCG Analysis). Indian E-Commerce market size to be \$ 56 billion by 2023 (Source: www.w3trainingschool.com)

Application of digital marketing in travel & tourism industry

The growth of digital marketing has had an impact and will continue to impact travel & tourism industry. It has become an essential tool for managing the business. Understanding the main drivers of travel & tourism that includes geographical diversity, government initiatives, development of customised packages, changing consumer dynamics, easily available finance and benefits of customised packages for the target market are the key towards success in tourism. As compared to traditional promotion methods that use printed information, voluminous contents are available online. As a source of instant information, the web/mobile app is the first choice as there are no restrictions or constraints in searching for information. To exercise hold on brand and to create equity, it is important to make consistent presence online. In addition, web is the place where customers share their valuable feedback; write reviews, share visuals to attract larger audience. Another significant fact is the ability of digital marketing to address the niche market where customers have specific requirements. Ex: Eco tourism, Adventure tourism, Medical tourism e.t.c. With internet it is now possible to cater to specific needs by providing necessary information.

Examples of digital marketing application

1. **Booking – Companies are recognizing the importance of second screen marketing:** Digital consumption today is very different from what it used to be, even a few years ago. The use of mobile devices is on the rise and the situation is no different for the tourism industry. Additionally, it might be even more deal-breaking since people use various devices to book their airplane tickets and hotel rooms. Due to that fact, there is an emerging trend of mobile-only travel agencies (MTAs). These companies offer travelers the ability to book tickets through downloadable mobile/tablet-exclusive apps.
2. **On-board – Experience marketing is as relevant as ever:** Travelling from point A to point B can be a long and tiring experience. In an attempt to make the journey experience more pleasant for travelers, airlines install advanced in-flight entertainment systems that allow people to watch movies and TV shows, play games, listen to the radio and make phone calls from the aircraft.
3. **At the Destination – Additional services result in repeat sales:** Before going on a trip, most people research the place they're about to visit. Once they arrive at the destination, the search for the best places to visit continues. Thankfully, the power of Wi-Fi allows travelers to use their devices anywhere from the hotel room to coffee shops and touristic attractions. As a

result, planning any trip becomes as easy as visiting a review website and choosing the next destination point.

Research Design

Statement of the Problem: The rapid growth of the travel & tourism in India, and increased usage of technology as a tool to facilitate online transactions, has led to a blending of technology with travel & tourism management. Research across the globe indicates that modern travelers & tourists are looking for interactive facilities, high-quality services, varied information on services and appropriate information to assist them in decision making. Also the prospective tourists are finding it difficult to identify the required information and are facing the problem of information overload. Like many other service industries, the travel & tourism industry has been significantly affected by the strides made in use of internet & technology. This research focuses on understanding impact of digital marketing on travel & tourism industry.

Research Objectives

- The purpose of research is to study the growth of tourism industry in India.
- The study ascertains the factors impacting different aspects relating to digital marketing in tourism.
- In specific, aim is to assess the impact of digital marketing on travel & tourism industry in India.

Significance of the study: The world is moving from analog to digital. Enormous data is getting generated and consumed through several electronic gadgets like mobiles, laptops, desktops and tabs. Use of digital medium is faster, streamlined, affordable and versatile. In addition, the business performance can be tracked and monitored. The fact is that, in digital age, organizations by default have to adapt to the changes, ever changing marketing environment by exploring and implementing the potential of digital marketing. Travel & Tourism industry is no exception. This helps to engage the customers and make sure they have the finest of away-from-home experience. In order to attain competitive advantage, players in tourism industry are looking for innovative ways to reach out to their potential buyers and customise services to their end users. This research helps in understanding customer demography characteristics, preferences, how do they plan trips, how often they travel, decision making factors, use of different products and services, evaluating experiences e.t.c. Also how the above elements are impacted by digital marketing.

Tools for data collection and analysis

- Sources of data: Both primary and secondary data are used for the study.
- Method of data collection: Primary data is collected through questionnaire using Google docs.
- Secondary data is collected from websites, books, publication and journals.
- Application of Chi-square & SPSS for analysis and hypotheses testing.

Summary

The major reason hospitality and tourism companies are so successful at adapting digital marketing strategies is because they carefully analyze how people interact with surrounding environments while travelling. These insights help them

recognize existing customer needs and give travelers what they want to create the “wow” effect and ensure repeat sales.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that digital marketing is inevitable for growth & prosperity of travel & tourism industry. It is one of the industries that are largely affected by digital phenomenon. In order to attain competitive advantage, tourism players are going with implementing the latest technology and exploring the right way to reach potential buyers by customizing their offerings to specific requirements. In addition to contributing to increase in sales for the seller, it makes easy for tourists to decide and buy services online instantly. Digital marketing is not just limited to desktops or laptops. The use of mobile apps is on the rise because people need to be connected with all the time.

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