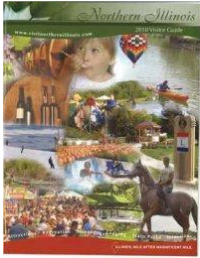




## **SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS**

**BONNIE HEIMBACH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
NORTHERN ILLINOIS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**

Find Northern Illinois Tourism on Facebook and Twitter at:



@VisitNorthernIL

Find Northern Illinois Wine Trail on Facebook and Twitter at:



@NorthernILWine

Find Illinois Lincoln Highway on Facebook and Twitter at:



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# SOCIAL MEDIA.....It All Starts With A Conversation

Getting Started...this session is NOT addressing the technical side of Social Media, we're taking this conversation to the next level...the whys and hows of Social Media...the point of establishing your online Business Identify, showcasing tools. Social Media can be used to assist your ongoing efforts with your business and organization.

**Definition:** Social media is media designed to be...

- disseminated through social interaction
- created using highly accessible and simple publishing techniques
- uses Internet and web-based technologies to transform broadcast conversations or monologues (one person to many) into social media dialogues (many people to many)

Social media utilization is believed to be a driving factor in the idea that the current period in time will be defined as the ATTENTION AGE.

**Social Media** – like your letterhead, logo, business card and even brochure, it needs to be treated, managed and marketed with the same care. And most importantly needs to reflect the impression and operations of your business to a larger and more diverse audience – one that may have never stepped in your front door...

There has been an **Evolution with Usage from the Web**.....whether you call it web 1.0, 2.0 or whatever.....basic functions were realized as follows:

- *Web 1.0*      *Internet and Communication*
- *Web 2.0*      *Commerce Added as Critical Functionality*
- *Web 3.0*      *Add in Community, Self Expression and Entertainment*

And with Web 3.0, the sense of Community and Self Expression is becoming more prevalent.....we rely on the internet community for facts, opinions, choices and decisions....we no longer rely on “perceived experts”. Google shared in a recent presentation that 87% of people looking for a hotel are influenced by reviews...and 30% changed their minds based on what they found and read. To summarize, we are becoming more influenced by user-generated reviews.

Which of the following sites would you consider to be “social”?

- Amazon.com
- MySpace.com
- YouTube.com
- Netflix.com
- **All**

It's true that social media outlets are more measurable, targetable and trackable than traditional media; however, it seems as if the bigger players are going for mass appeal rather than micro appeal. Here's how they started:

- Facebook started as an outlet for college students
  - MySpace for artistic types (musicians, painters...)
  - Twitter as a fast way to keep friends and interested parties up-to-date on your activities
- ...and ALL have evolved to be much more mass-appeal social media outlets.

### Then consider these factors:

- The average weekday circulation at 379 US newspapers fell 10.6% during the six months ending in September 2009, according to published reports.
- Number of households subscribing to magazines dropped 2% points while subscriptions for home video and smart phone services increased.
- DVR households have tripled in the last three years.

### Social media marketing has three important aspects:

1. **Creating buzz or newsworthy events, videos, tweets, or blog entries that attract attention, and become viral in nature.** Buzz is what makes social media marketing work. It replicates a message through user to user contact, rather than the traditional method of purchasing of an ad or promoting a press release. The message does not necessarily have to be about the product. Many successful viral campaigns have gathered steam through an amusing or compelling message, with the company logo or tagline included incidentally.
2. **Building ways that enable fans of a brand or company to promote a message** themselves in multiple online social media venues. Fan pages in Twitter, MySpace or Facebook follow this model.
3. It is based around **online conversations**. Social media marketing is not controlled by the organization. Instead **it encourages user participation and dialogue**. A badly designed social media marketing campaign can potentially backfire on the organization that created it. To be successful SMM campaigns must fully engage and respect the users.

One recent study claims that 10 minutes spent on Facebook can expose the user to as many as 90 different media messages. That's a sure fire recipe for advertising ineffectiveness at best and user abandonment/immunity at least.

Can and should social media be more niche specific? Yes and no. You can't blame the sites for trying to drive as much revenue as possible with the least amount of effort; hence the mass media mindset seems to be prevailing in a world that is infinitely customizable. Yet, long term, this will make advertising on these portals more meaningless.

**Suggestions & Solutions:** Create a Social Media Strategy as part of your corporate Marketing Plan and break it down by segments; Make sure you incorporate testing and measurements in all that you do, and have established goals that your marketing must meet – by medium used, the same as you track leads from an ad, track your Social Media programs. Planning and testing are the keys to your success. And all of the sites just mentioned are social media sites, but for today's discussion, we'll focus only on 2 tools discussed: **Facebook & Twitter**.

# **Basic Social Media Strategy**

## **Listen and Identify...**

- What are people already saying about you?
- Identify Benchmarks
- Set Goals
- Tools:
  - o Google Alerts
  - o RRS Google Reader
  - o Delicious
  - o TweetDeck

### **Facebook**

What are FANS saying about you  
Identify benchmarks  
Set Goals

### **Twitter**

What are people saying about your area/business  
What information do your visitors want/need  
Track keywords

## **Engagement and Tools...**

- Provide useful content
- Interact and respond to your customers
- Interact with your community partners
- Seek potential customers
- Aggregate, don't aggravate
- Tools:
  - o Twitter
  - o Facebook
  - o YouTube
  - o Flickr

### **Facebook**

Provide useful content  
Write engaging content  
to upload photos to your page  
Offer discounts for your FANS  
Use RRS tools to post blogs

### **Twitter**

Provide useful content  
People love to hear about FREE events Encourage FANS  
Provide special discounts to Twitter FOLLOWERS  
Interact with @replies and retweets  
Seek potential visitors and follow them

## **Monitor and Measure**

- What are your competitors doing?
- Track, analyze and modify if needed
- Track:
  - o Audience
  - o Engagement
  - o Influence
  - o Action
  - o Metrics should map goals

### **Facebook**

Page Manager / Facebook Insights  
Track, analyze and modify efforts if needed

### **Twitter**

What are your competitors doing?  
Interactions: @replies, Direct Messages (DM)  
Message Reach: retweets  
Stats: Amount of URL clicks from bit.ly or BudURL  
Google Analytics: website traffic coming/from Twitter  
Activity: stats from Twitter Grader or Tweet Stats  
Always **analyze** and **modify** efforts for best results

# Measuring Social Media:

**Identifying Objectives:** Start with understanding what you want to accomplish. Objectives will drive metrics. For example: Are you trying to sell more rooms? Do you want to bring more people in for a specific event? Do you want to create PR opportunities for your destination?

## **Defining your Key Performance Indicators:**

If you were specific enough when identifying objectives this should be easy. For example: If growing awareness about your destination as a wine region is a strategic goal, click-throughs on “wine-tweets” can be a good metric. If you’re targeting out of town visitors the location of your followers is really key. Getting more followers locally does not help that goal and you should be using Twitter tools that analyze the geographic distribution of your followers to see if you are on the right track.

## **Defining your benchmarks:**

Before you start don’t forget to measure where you are at now. Examples of benchmarks are number of:

- Facebook FANS
- Twitter FOLLOWERS
- Digg links
- Delicious bookmarks
- Referrals from social media sites
- Existing website traffic, search engine rankings, etc
- How much time and money you spent on traditional marketing

## **Measure and analyze:**

See where you are now compared to your benchmark and your goals. See what can be changed and improved. Act upon it. **Measuring Tips:**

### **For Twitter:**

- Number of followers
- Number of updates
- Number of click-throughs on tweeted URLs
- 3rd party measurement tools (Grader, Twinfluence, etc.)

### **For Facebook:**

- To successfully measure engagement it is absolute paramount to use a URL shortener that allows clicks to be tracked. Once you select a shortener stick to it.
  
- Facebook offers very comprehensive, free analytics tools (Facebook Insights). One partner suggests measuring the impact of the Facebook activities based on the following metrics:
  - o Number of fans
  - o Fan demographics
  - o Fan interactions

# Keys To Social Media Success: Facebook

**Page Name:** The name you give your Page is permanent, so make sure it's the one your fans and customers will recognize.

**Profile Picture:** Make sure to choose a good quality profile picture that best represents you. Make sure the image is still clear when reduced to thumbnail size.

**Content:** Make sure the content you put out there is engaging and useful. Try to use different types of content (pictures, videos, links). It is best to develop a content strategy and a publishing schedule.

**Participation:** If you want your fans to come back, update your page regularly (at least once per work day). Keeping the content fresh will help to start conversations. Engaging in the conversation is the key. When your FANS interact with your Facebook Page, stories linking to your Page can go to their friends via News Feed. As these friends interact with your Page, News Feed keeps driving word-of-mouth to a wider circle of friends.

**Measure It:** Facebook offers very comprehensive, free analytics tools (Facebook Insights). One partner suggests measuring the impact of the Facebook activities based on the following metrics:

- Number of fans
- Fan demographics
- Fan interactions

## **Facebook Summary:**

### **Facebook: What is it?**

- Social networking site
- Keep up with friends and family
- Reconnect with classmates and colleagues
- Share photos and videos

### **Facebook: Who uses it?**

- Anyone looking to connect with: Friends, Family or Groups
- Anyone looking to show their support of: Companies/ Non-profits, Destinations or Sports Teams

### **Facebook: Why is it special?**

- Over 350 million users, volunteering personal information regarding their interests, location and lifestyle
- Worldwide community

### **Facebook: What does it offer for the tourism and travel sector?**

- Create fan pages
- Initiate viral marketing efforts
- Connect with your destination's greatest enthusiasts

### **Facebook: How does it work?**

- Sign up for a free account
- Fill out your profile
- Import a picture
- Start connecting

**Reminder:** any information you share on Facebook will be in their archives forever, so it is easier to add information than to take it away. Feel free to start with minimal information and expand upon it as you become more comfortable with the site.

# Keys To Social Media Success: Twitter

**Content:** In order to be successful on Twitter you have to provide value to readers. Always think whether the tweet you are about to send is relevant to your followers. The more and better information you provide, the more people will come to you. Develop a content strategy and stick to clearly defined themes.

**Tweets:** The tone of the messages should be conversational but not too casual. Abbreviations, acronyms and special characters should be avoided. Always keep your audience and objectives you are trying to pursue in mind. Composing the Twitter messages ahead of time/ "pre-tweeting" is a good practice that helps more efficient and create high quality tweets.

**Participation:** Listen to others, tweet often, quote someone's tweets (retweet), ask for feedback. When you find someone tweeting about your destination or product respond to them, this builds engagement and brand loyalty.

## Search:

- Find tweets about your destination by using twitter search.
- Find fellow tweeples by subject/industry by using Twellow; also you are able to submit your profile to this site, so more users find you.
- Hashtags are similar to tags; they make it easier to search for a specific topic. This is what a hashtag looks like #hashtag.

**Measure It:** One partner suggests measuring the impact of the Twitter activities based on the following metrics:

- Number of followers
- Number of updates
- Number of click-throughs on tweeted URLs
- 3rd party measurement tools (Grader, Twinfluence etc.)

Hint: To successfully measure engagement it is absolutely paramount to use a URL shortener (e.g. bit.ly) that allows clicks to be tracked. Once you select a shortener stick to it.

## Twitter Summary:

### **Twitter: What is it?**

- Micro-blogging site
- Users have 140 characters to compose a message
- Updates are broadcast to their entire network

### **Twitter: Who uses it?**

- Early adopters in the tech / web sector
- Bloggers and people who used to blog before twitter
- Companies that want to update and interact with customers

### **Twitter: Why is it special?**

- Simple user interface and its FREE
- Highly addictive
- Allows integration of content into twitter and vice versa
- Information exchange is more open

### **Twitter: What does it offer for the tourism and travel sector?**

- Find out what people are saying about your product or region (e.g. twitterscan)
- Send out updates without having to set up a blog
- Follow people who are opinion leaders in your area
- Push content like calendar of events to the Twitter platform

### **Twitter: How does it work?**

- Sign up for a free account
- Start creating tweets
- Search for people who are using Twitter already
- Follow the people you find interesting