

Social Media Marketing

Taking Social Media Marketing to the Next Level

By Carolyn J. Feimster SCMD, President, CJF Marketing International, North Brunswick, NJ

DO YOU TWITTER AND/OR BLOG? Is your center on Facebook? Are you on LinkedIn? If not, you may be missing out on an excellent opportunity for cost-efficient exposure, especially important in today's environment of shrinking to non-existent marketing budgets.

Many of us already use these tools for personal enjoyment, to renew old acquaintances and meet new people with similar interests, to share photos, etc. But it is more important to view them as social media marketing tools.

"We are talking about more than just building your destination and interactive web strategies. Most everyone has done that by now. Rather, this new field of social networking that has exploded in recent months has not yet been viewed as a strategic distribution channel to get your shopping center's message out. Done properly, this can demonstrate a tremendous ROI for you," explains Franci C. Edgerly, president and CEO of ITI Marketing, Inc.

Edgerly says social media strategies should be a part of your overall Internet marketing program to help build brand awareness and loyalty. "It used to be enough to develop strategies to drive traffic to your web site, but with the newer social media techniques, you have the capability to do so much more," said Edgerly.

Let's start with some definitions (from Wikipedia, with minor revisions):

- **LinkedIn** is a site mainly used for professional networking. As of May 2009, it had more than 39 million registered users spanning 170 industries.
- **Facebook** is a free social networking website operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. Users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school and region to connect and interact with other people.
- **Mobile Marketing** is marketing on or with a mobile device, such as a mobile phone, which has become increasingly popular since the rise of SMS (Short Message Service) early this decade (text messaging).
- **Twitter** is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read other users' updates, known as tweets. Tweets are text posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have subscribed to them (known as followers).
- **Blog** (a contraction of the term weblog) is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary,

descriptions of events or other material such as graphics or video. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

How Can We Use These Resources?

LinkedIn. You can use this service to keep on top of the latest trends in the shopping center industry by linking in with ICSC's group. LinkedIn's Groups Directory allows you to find communities of professionals who share a common experience, passion, interest, affiliation or goal. For example, I learned that Simon Property Group had announced a new marketing plan that will include hosting 11,000 events this year by logging into a discussion group of International Council of Shopping Center members.

As of this writing, several comments were posted, including one from Karen Scott, SCMD, CDP, president of Centerworks Retail. Asked why she participated, she responded that she thought it was the best business-to-business online group.

"It is challenging to keep up with all the social groups. I especially appreciate the discussion reports I get at the end of the day from LinkedIn that allow me to view and zoom in on conversations and topics I am really interested in," she said. Scott, a LinkedIn member since February, also uses Facebook for her family and has

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started her own blog to promote her company.

As of early May 2009, there are over 275,307 groups in LinkedIn. Certainly you will find one that interests you. Take it to the next level and start your own group. LinkedIn offers clear instructions.

When I searched for shopping centers, nothing came up except a group of certified developers and some off-shoots from ICSC, such as lawyers. At no cost you can start a group with unlimited reach. Of course you have to work it. Ask questions and encourage responses on the new fall fashions, hair styles and make-up. Get a discussion going about a new store or restaurant. You can be as creative as you want!

Facebook. While this seems more social and less business, you can use it for business contacts and different trade associations you belong to. I was recently asked to be a “fan” of the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa, a member of The Sandestin Alliance (see my series in JONESREPORT Plus in February, March and April). Our advertising agency has pro-

posed that we set up a Facebook page. Not only would we have our own page, we would also provide links to all the Alliance members’ pages.

In the April 2009 issue of *Agent At Home*, travel editor and owner of Elite Travel International Stacy H. Small suggests investing in one of the many books on marketing yourself on Facebook. She uses

ly. “A mobile marketing strategy allows you to send your message to motivated prospective customers, because they have to sign up in advance to receive your message. As a result, over 90% of text messages are read by the recipient.” Imagine if all your marketing efforts could boast that kind of success.

How do you use mobile marketing? First, announce your offers, events, promotions, etc. in advance of a trip being made to your center. Second, announce in-store offers while the customer is at your center. Third, ask for feedback from your customers once they depart.

During this year’s Shop America’s Global Shop Summit, one of the most interesting sessions, “Online Marketing Trends,” was presented by

Kathy Anderson of AZ Travel Marketing. Anderson provided updated internet statistics. (See box). Then she offered online and social marketing strategies shopping center marketing directors could implement.

“Just because you may not have time to blog, don’t think there aren’t others out there doing it for you. It is important to understand social media

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Internet Usage Facts:

- 48% of Americans use the Internet more than one hour per day
- 78% use the web to make travel decisions
- Daily search users grew 69% between 2002 and 2008
- Searchers with incomes of \$75,000+ were the most active daily searchers at 62%
- 71% of 60-somethings and 52% of 70-somethings had used a search engine in the past week, according to *Advertising Age*
- 91% of senior marketing execs plan to maintain or increase online advertising, 55% are cutting traditional media to do it (McKinsy, 2008)

International Internet Usage Facts

- World Internet usage 2000-2008: North America, +129%; Europe, +266%; Asia, +406%, and the Middle East, +1176%!
- Through 2008, online travel bookings in Europe represented 29% of sales (projected to grow by double-digits, unlike the US)
- Gross bookings of tour operator web sites grew by 12.4%
- Largest markets: UK, France, Germany, Spain, Italy
- International audiences are online, at lower cost, and results are measurable

Social Networking

- 68% of Americans trust the web for travel-related advice. Only 5% trust travel agencies (Travel Trust Index)
- DMOs using blogs: GoSeePortland.com

Facebook to post links to her web sites and to communicate with potential clients. She predicts Facebook will soon be a recognized verb!

Mobile Marketing. This is probably going to be the next wave of marketing for our industry. Why? Because you can reach your potential client before, during and after he visits your center. “But that is just the beginning,” explains Edger-

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marketing for two reasons: One, to stay on top of what is being said about you and counteract it as you can. Second, you can control the content of what is being said about you simply by starting your own blog and participating in other blogs with current information about your center," Anderson suggests.

She gave examples of sites to use, such as about.com, where the editors are seeking updated content. Check out their 15-minute fashion blog. Others include tripadvisor.com,

yelp.com, sogonow.com, boo.com and flickr.com.

Southwest Does It Right

Another valuable suggestion Anderson had was to download a Google map to your center's web site. This will bring you higher up in the Google search engine. She also suggested reviewing the Southwest Airlines Facebook page for an excellent example of social networking.

As I was looking up Southwest, I found myself on the South Street Seaport page and spent an hour reading everything until I realized I needed to get back to work. I decided to

further test this social media craze and posted the question on my Facebook page: "How does everyone have time for this?" Stay tuned for part two of this article. I will highlight some of the most interesting answers.

Part two will also include an interview with Tricia Lewis, online media specialist for the 34th Street Partnership, a business improvement district in New York City. She manages www.fashionherald.blogspot.com for the Partnership.

We are continuing this series of articles on tourism every other month and would like to focus on some of the more innovative tourism programs. Please submit your programs to me, either via e-mail at Carolyn@CJFMarketingInternational.com, by fax 732/545-3138 or mail. If possible, include samples of your graphics via e-mail. Full credit will be given to the person or team responsible for the program. Visit our new website: www.cjfmarketinginternational.com. ■

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The Report for Shopping Center Marketing & Management

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