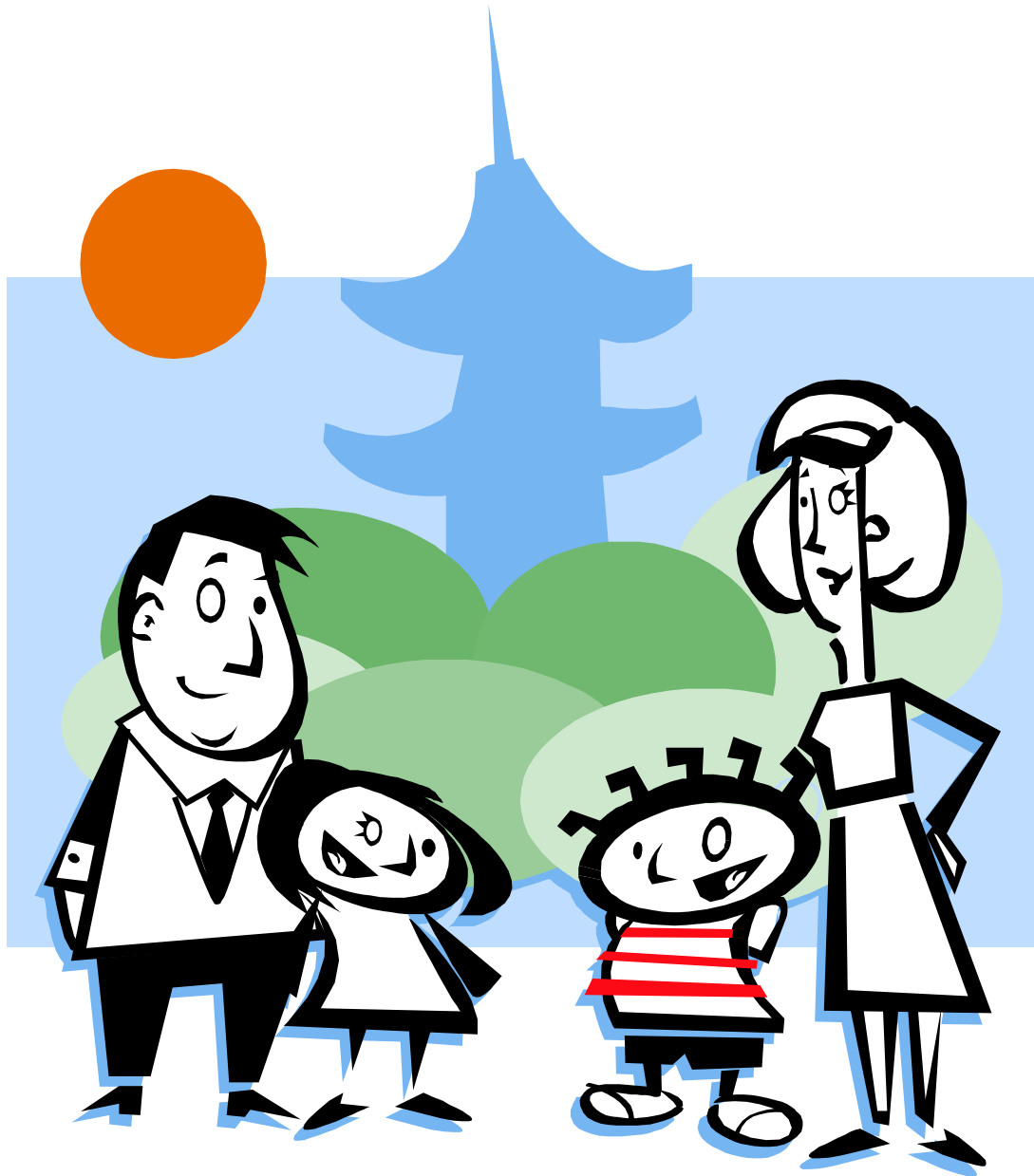


**A GUIDE TO SOCIAL NETWORKING AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TOURISM**



**VERSION 1.1**

**WRITTEN BY**

**BARRY WHEELER**

<http://www.barrywheeler.ca>  
<http://www.twitter.com/barrywheeler>

## **INTRODUCTION**

Market research indicates that over 80 percent of travellers use the internet to plan and organize their trip. To capitalize on this tremendous potential, tourism businesses must be strategic and utilize online tools as part of their business operations.

For a business in the tourism industry this goes beyond having a website and means reaching out to potential clients across the changing online landscape. It means engaging people using a variety of online tools and providing information that is timely. Strategic marketing of a tourism based business must harness the potential of social networking and social media.

This guide provides an overview of social networking and social media while providing the basic strategies that can be used to incorporate these into any strategic internet marketing plan for tourism. This guide is free compliments of Barry Wheeler – blogger, business owner and novice internet entrepreneur.

## **SOCIAL NETWORKING VS. SOCIAL MEDIA**

Examining the basic differences between social networking and social media is the key to understanding why these items are important to the tourism industry.

At its core, social networking is about building relationships and social media is about developing and delivering a message. While related, these items are not synonymous. However, at the core of both social networking and social media are people.

Social networking is about connecting with a community of people and interacting with those people. Social media is seen as user generated content that is often spread through social networks.

Developing an understanding of the people and designing a strategy around interacting and engaging them through social networking/social media is the foundation for successful marketing for any tourism based business. Leveraging the power and reach of social networks is the core to a successful social marketing strategy especially in tourism based businesses.

Social networking and social media will require direct involvement by the business to realize the benefits of this interaction with potential clients. Having the capacity to reach out and directly engage people interested in your product and/or service provides a unique opportunity with the potential to reap major rewards upon the business.

Social media crosses the boundaries of social networks and content sharing sites and has taken the power of advertising and marketing out of the hands of big business, placing it squarely in the hands of consumers.

## **TYPES OF SOCIAL NETWORKING / SOCIAL MEDIA USERS**

Social networks grow out of connections made by users that facilitate the easy exchange of knowledge and information. As with traditional social interactions distinct personality types are formed online and it is these personality types that influence the success or failure of any social marketing initiative. It is important for tourism operators to realize this.

The key to success in using social networking / social media stems directly from the relationships built between users. Developing relationships that are trustworthy and credible portrays a positive online reputation. It is the core component of a successful social marketing strategy.

Having an understanding of the various personality types provides insight into how social networking and social media can be used to gain competitive advantage in the marketplace. The key is finding a balance.

Some of the more distinct personality types that tend to emerge on social networks are:

1. **Clueless Self-Promoter**  
This user uses the social networking sites and social media to promote their own interests and does nothing to enhance the relationship with other users. This type of user is typically ignored by others and eventually disappears when their efforts yield little or no success.
2. **Spammer**  
The spammer is very obvious to identify. This user constantly submits irrelevant items and links that promote items that are of little or no importance to the user community. This type of user annoys and eventually gets banned from the social network.
3. **Critic**  
The critic sees value in correcting mistakes and factual errors and shows great interest in topical conversations. This type of user has an opinion and is not afraid to voice it. This personality type tends to avoid online socialization and sees social networks and social media as a mechanism for producing better knowledge throughout the community. Relationships formed by this type of user tend to be professional in nature.
4. **Know-it-all**  
The know-it-all is annoying to many members of a social network. The opinions of this personality type are usually complete garbage and generally irrelevant. They have opinions on every topic and generally have better ways of doing things.
5. **Extremist**  
The extremist sees the conspiracy in everything that occurs both online and offline. This type of user will typically carry everything to the nth degree and appear at times to be a little deranged.
6. **Spectator**  
The spectator is someone who reads, observes and rarely posts. They use social networks strictly for the social media content and would rather watch the action from the sidelines. If they do participate, their contribution is generally well thought out and contains quality information.
7. **Enthusiast**  
This personality type brings a user that is knowledgeable about social networks and the implications of social media. This type of user has learned how to engage users effectively, has a following and is willing to provide help when asked.
8. **Expert**  
The expert user knows how to leverage social networks and social media to the advantage of their clients or business. They have learned the intricate details of how things work and they are successful in their areas because of this knowledge.

At some point, most social networking and social media users take on different personalities depending on the situation that arises. However, it is important to find a balance. Having a willingness to learn, participate and engage means the difference between success or failure of any social marketing strategy.

### **IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TOURISM**

When it comes to the tourism industry, people generally trust what other people say about an experience. When a traveller has a great experience they share that experience with friends and family. The same can be said for poor experiences.

On a social network these items get shared and referenced by other members of the social network.

Utilizing the personal experiences of visitors creates a sense of personalization. Other people see this as being the real deal and trust this type of content much more than the marketing material typically aimed at the traveller.

Some of the more popular blogs focus on travel blogging, where users share their daily experiences and highlights of their trips abroad.

### **ENGAGE, ENGAGE, ENGAGE**

Success in social networking and social media is not about having someone indicate that a product or service is great and why it should be purchased. Advertising campaigns trying to make something appear real became less and less successful and companies that had built relationships with clients were successful.

With social networking and social media success starts with building relationships that customers trust and continuing with the relationship after the sale. The relationship has to be real and not built to facilitate obtaining the sale. It's about engaging customers and establishing a trust.

Trust is the key to a successful travel and tourism business. Instead of establishing a presence on every social network, travel and tourism operators would do better to become involved in the communities that will benefit their operations and use these social networks to grow relationships, establish trust and engage customers.

As the relationships build, trust and credibility will be gained. The more you engage the more value you add to the relationship and even if this does not convert to a sale, it builds trust in the market – a crucial component to success in the travel and tourism industry.

Quite often the relationships designed around this principle will exist long before it is converted into a business transaction. It is these relationships that will continue beyond the transaction and create recurring goodwill, something that is rapidly becoming a valuable commodity as people are presented with more options.

Engage and cherish the relationships built through social networking and social media. Do not take the narrow view that once a sale is made, it is the end of the

relationship. Continue to nourish the relationship and reap the benefits of long-term success.

## **ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT**

Is there such a thing as online reputation management?

Online Reputation Management is a reality in today's information based world. With the advent of social networking and social media sites such as FaceBook, Twitter and MySpace, it has been very easy for people to forget about their online reputation. The anonymity once given by the vast size of the internet exists no more. The power of search engines and the existence of user generated content from these sites has far reaching implications to both a person's and business' online reputation.

In the tourism industry, reputation can make or break a company. The good experiences of travellers can have a positive impact and increase business, while bad experiences tend to spread rapidly.

With people posting on blogs, using Twitter and FaceBook, potential customers have the opportunity to uncover potential issues faster than ever. Every post, topic and picture posted adds to a business' online reputation. The ability of the major search engines to index and rank content means that this information is available for everyone in near real-time.

Online reputation management is not just about managing what you say but also about managing what others say as well. Online reputation management is not about avoiding the social media sites especially if you are a business where others are talking about you. Online reputation management is about developing an understanding for the information in the "wild", understanding the implications of real-time search and being aware of what is being talked about.

Real-time search ensures that user generated content is crawled and indexed at an alarmingly fast rate. This means content included on authority sites such as YouTube and Twitter can quickly rank for specific content. The accuracy of this information does not matter because the search engines simply rank based on relevancy to the search being performed. Inaccurate stories rank just as well as those that are accurate.

If a business remains passive and does not take an active role in managing their online reputation they may lose business.

What can be done?

Fortunately, some social media sites and blogs allow for comments and/or dialogue. Using this as a forum, businesses can attempt to clear the air and put the incident behind them. This can have the danger of also keeping the content on a particular issue fresh in the search engines or prolonging the effects of negative press.

It may also be possible to use search engine optimization and rank for more positive items. Continually posting content with a positive spin will eventually result in the negative content being overcome in the search results.

Others have attempted to repair their online reputation by contacting websites and requesting to have the content removed. Some sites will comply if provided a good reason; however, dealing with the items indexed and cached in a search engine is a different story. Google will not remove content from its index. Requesting removal of the content is perhaps a last resort that individuals or businesses should consider. It may cause negative issues to resurface, be crawled and indexed, propagating the items more into the public realm than desired.

What experts do recommend about online reputation management is that things get nipped in the bud well before they get out of control. With real-time search having the ability to rank negative items, it can also be utilized to repair the reputation and damage caused. Positive items, explanations and well developed public relations campaigns that harness real-time search can benefit the business in question.

Online reputation management is a reality. It is important to take a proactive rather than reactive role in online reputation management.

## **SOCIAL NETWORKING AND SOCIAL MEDIA SITES FOR TOURISM**

With a multitude of social networking and social media sites in existence it is impossible to actively participate across all the online social environments. There are several social networking and social media sites that can be utilized for the tourism business than can be leveraged to create a clear distinction from the competition.

Sites such as TripAdvisor, YouTube and Google Maps are used in planning trips. These are great starting points for any tourism business seeking to develop a social marketing strategy. These sites have large numbers of followers, hold authority in their niche, are well indexed by the major search engines and allow content to be embedded into another website.

### **TRIPADVISOR ([WWW.TRIPADVISOR.COM](http://www.tripadvisor.com))**

TripAdvisor is the authority site used by travellers to read real information, tips, advice and opinions provided by other travellers. It provides information on cities, hotels, restaurants and attractions supplemented with contributions from real travellers.

Content on TripAdvisor is indexed by the search engines regularly because of its authority in the travel and tourism niche. This means that any user contribution about an experience (good or bad) with any tourism based business will be indexed relatively quickly. Most travel and tourism operators will not have the resources necessary to outrank TripAdvisor in the search engines, meaning these user reviews, advice and opinions will typically appear earlier in the search engine results and will be found by more people.

Travel and tourism operators must embrace and use this strategically to gain a competitive advantage.

According to TripAdvisor, it receives more than 32 million visitors each month and allows owners of accommodations, attractions, restaurants and resources to be listed at no charge. To access the "Get Listed" page of TripAdvisor visit <http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted.html>. Provided on the "Get Listed" page

is information regarding the different categories for TripAdvisor and access to the links required to list travel and tourism related businesses.

You can get listed on TripAdvisor through the following links:

- Accommodation - [http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted\\_hotel.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted_hotel.html)
- Attraction - [http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted\\_attraction.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted_attraction.html)
- Restaurant - [http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted\\_restaurant.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted_restaurant.html)
- Resource - [http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted\\_resource.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted_resource.html)

Take advantage of video and photo gallery options that are made available through TripAdvisor. Provide as much information as you can about your business, including things such as descriptions, rates and policies. This information, along with other user reviews, is what a traveller will use to make decisions.

The success of TripAdvisor comes largely from the contributions made by the community members in the form of reviews. Once listed, a travel / tourism company can respond to reviews that may already have been submitted to the social media site. Even though a business may not have listed itself, it is still possible for previous customers to have written a review without a business knowing.

Having a negative review existing on a site such as TripAdvisor will damage the online reputation of the company. Responding to all reviews, both negative and positive is an important part of creating an engaging social experience for TripAdvisor users. Addressing negative reviews in a timely fashion will provide some mediation to the incident as well as go a long ways towards protecting the online reputation of a business.



The screenshot shows a TripAdvisor review for "Great B & B Annie's Guest House". The reviewer is "JBarron" from the UK, with 1 contribution, and the review was posted on "Nov 27, 2007". The review has a rating of 5 stars (represented by five green circles) and is marked as "helpful" by 2/2 users. The review text reads: "I had a very comfortable stay and would definitely stay here again, it was very friendly. The room was nice and clean and breakfast was very tasty. They have free WiFi and there was no charge for using my credit card either. I would recommend this B&B." Below the review, it shows the "Date of Stay" as "November 2007" and "Member since" as "November 27, 2007". A disclaimer states: "This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC." At the bottom, there are options to "view profile", "send message", and "Compliment Reviewer". A "Save Review" button is visible in the top right corner.

Reviews will come naturally; however, a business can be strategic and encourage patrons to post reviews by offering incentives such as small discounts on their next visit. Becoming active in building a positive impression online will not only increase credibility but will ultimately increase business.

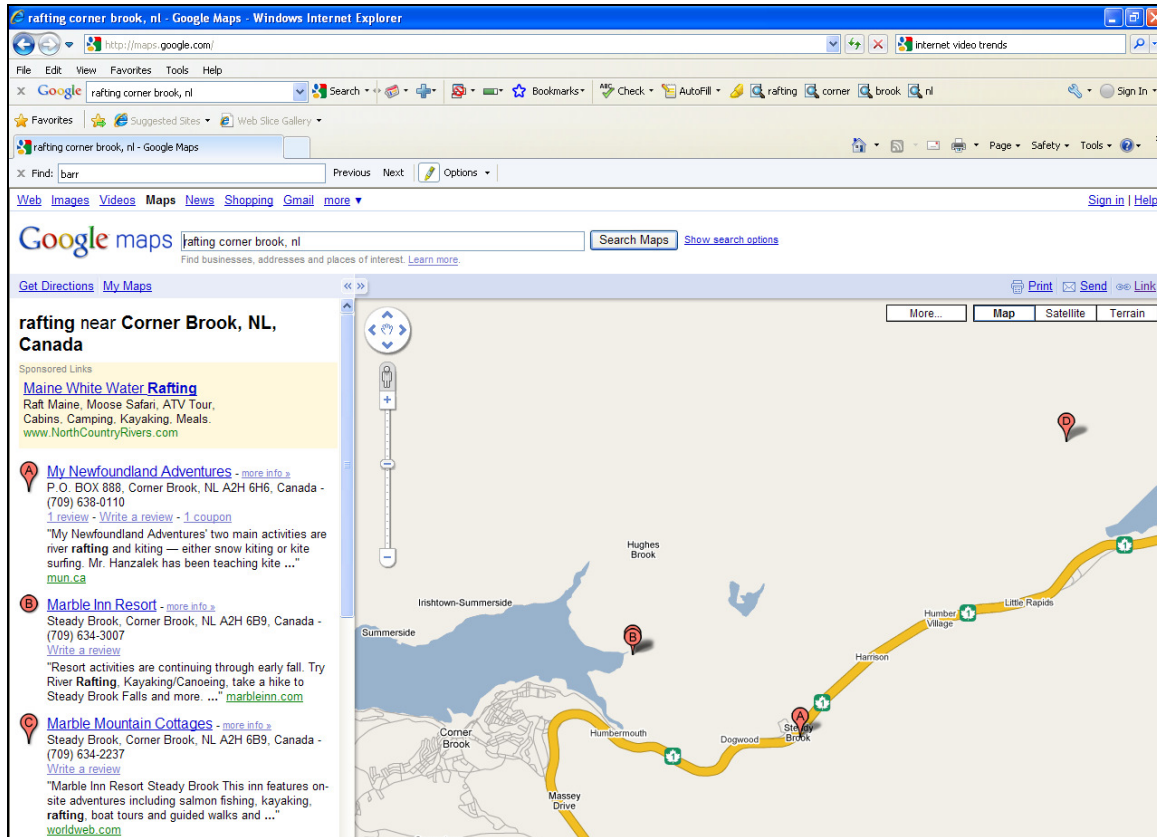
TripsAdvisor provides tools and connectors allowing webmasters and site owners to access TripAdvisor content and display it on their websites. As well, TripAdvisor licenses content to partner websites such as Google Maps.

People planning a trip and using Google Maps to search for a travel or tourism business in a particular area will see any information entered in TripAdvisor that shares the same name of a business. Thus, reviews entered in Trip Advisor will be displayed on the generated Google Map.

## GOOGLE MAPS (MAPS.GOOGLE.COM)

Google Maps is used more and more by travellers and offers a unique opportunity to business owners to harness the power of this particular resource. Google Maps is not only used to provide directions to travellers but to provide suggestions on local companies, attractions, photos, video and reviews of places that have been identified as being from the area searched.

For example, using Google Maps and searching for "rafting Corner Brook, NL" (the area that I live), it returns the following map.



This shows the location of Corner Brook, NL and identifies three tourism related businesses that offer rafting to the left of the map, providing information on available reviews and coupons for those businesses.

Prominently displayed are the company names, address, phone numbers, more info and any reviews and/or coupons available to potential visitors. There is also a brief summary of exactly what the company is promoting as part of its product offering.

People are also given an opportunity to "Write a review" for any of the companies returned as part of the search.

**A** [My Newfoundland Adventures](#) - more info »  
P.O. BOX 888, Corner Brook, NL A2H 6H6, Canada - (709) 638-0110  
[1 review](#) - [Write a review](#) - [1 coupon](#)  
"My Newfoundland Adventures' two main activities are river **rafting** and kiting — either snow kiting or kite surfing. Mr. Hanzalek has been teaching kite ..."  
[mun.ca](#)

**B** [Marble Inn Resort](#) - more info »  
Steady Brook, Corner Brook, NL A2H 6B9, Canada - (709) 634-3007  
[Write a review](#)  
"Resort activities are continuing through early fall. Try River **rafting**, Kayaking/Canoeing, take a hike to Steady Brook Falls and more. ..." [marbleinn.com](#)

**C** [Marble Mountain Cottages](#) - more info »  
Steady Brook, Corner Brook, NL A2H 6B9, Canada - (709) 634-2237  
[Write a review](#)  
"Marble Inn Resort Steady Brook This inn features on-site adventures including salmon fishing, kayaking, **rafting**, boat tours and guided walks and ..."  
[worldweb.com](#)

Should a person select the "More info" option, they are presented with an expanded view of items Google has discovered about this particular company, including access to websites, video clips, photos, contact information and reviews.

Notice that the more information available for the businesses listed, the more is shown on Google Maps. It is important to keep the information entered up-to-date as quite often this will be the first contact that a user sees. The expanded view that would be presented to the potential traveller would look similar to the one shown below.

The screenshot shows a Google Maps business listing for "My Newfoundland Adventures". The listing includes the following information:

- 1 review - [Write a review](#)
- P.O. BOX 888  
Corner Brook, NL A2H 6H6, Canada  
(709) 638-0110  
[mynewfoundlandadventures.com](http://mynewfoundlandadventures.com)
- Get directions: [To here](#) - [From here](#)  
[Add or edit your business](#)
- Map showing the location at Steady Brook.
- Navigation tabs: Overview, Details (1), Reviews (1), Coupons (1), Photos & Videos (4), Web Pages (3)
- Review: ★★★★★ **River Rafting Tour and Fishing** - [Martin](#) - May 28, 2009  
We went Salmon Fishing and did the Humber River Rafting tour and we totally amazed. This is hands down the best Newfoundland family vacation ... [More »](#)
- [See all 4 photos »](#)
- Website: [www.mynewfoundlandadventures.com](http://www.mynewfoundlandadventures.com)
- Payment Accepted: Check, Traveler's Check, American Express, Cash, MasterCard, Visa
- Description: My Newfoundland Adventures offers the very best in Outdoor Adventures in Newfoundland, Canada. They specialize in small group travel, taking people off the beaten path to experiences of a lifetime!
- Email: [info@mynewfoundland.ca](mailto:info@mynewfoundland.ca)
- Provided by the business owner

The information displayed is extremely valuable to any person planning a trip. A potential customer has access to reviews, coupons, photos, video clips, contact information, websites and directions to this particular company.

Why would any business in the travel and tourism industry choose not to utilize Google Maps?

Google Maps is integrated with another Google resource called Google Local Business Center. It allows businesses to enter information about their operation and integrate it with other Google products such as Google Maps. For a great video that explains exactly what the Google Local Business Center, Google has a great YouTube Video that can be accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjeCmHwqVpU>.

To access the Google Local Business Center visit <http://www.google.com/lbc>.

**Google Local Business Center**

Change Language: English

**Sign up now »**

Sign in to Local Business Center with your **Google Account**

Email:

Password:

Stay signed in

**Sign in**

[Can't access your account?](#)

**Help customers find you on Google, it's free.**

- Free listing**  
Local customers already search Google for the products and services you offer. Create a business listing to be sure they find you.
- Free updates**  
Keep your address, phone number, hours of operation, and more up-to-date. Even create coupons and display photos and videos, all for free.
- New! Free insights**  
Use the power of Google's data to learn where your customers come from and what they search for to find you.

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Take advantage of the Google Local Business Center and include as much detail as possible, including categories, photos and videos. The more information provided, the more likely the listing will get noticed by readers and by Google.

Once a business listing has been created using the Google Local Business Center it will automatically be included on Google Maps. There may be a listing already created or included on Google Maps prior to establishing the listing. Google does permit business owners to claim the listing and edit the details.

Google Maps also includes the ability to create personalized maps and have those maps displayed during searches. These personalized maps can also be embedded into a business' website, used to provide directions, identify tourist attractions and highlight areas of interest such as police, hospital and train stations.

Utilizing Google Maps will increase traffic to a business website and enhance the visibility of a business. It is a must for any travel and tourism business.

## **YouTube ([WWW.YOUTUBE.COM](http://www.youtube.com))**

YouTube is a video sharing site that has close to 100 million users. Tourism businesses can harness the power of video very easily and provide potential customers with the opportunity to experience a product. More and more people are visiting online video sites searching for unique experiences when they are on vacation or visiting a particular area.

Video showing the different aspects of a tourism operation such as lodging, tours and attractions can be created relatively inexpensively. These can be uploaded to YouTube and made available through YouTube. Including real customers in real situations would add credibility to your video and remove the "feel" of it being a commercial, adding a sense of realism. Using video to highlighting attractions in the area that may supplement your tourism business is one way to remove the perception that video is a blatant advertisement.

Hotels for example may want to highlight video from events and festivals that are close, creating a desire for the traveller to want to stay close to where the action is occurring. Hotels in Kissimmee, Florida, have made the point that they are close to Disney a major selling point and capitalized on the Disney traffic. Incorporating this into their social marketing strategy would pay even more dividends.

Videos uploaded should be clearly identified with proper keywords and descriptions to show up during relevant searches. These can be incorporated in and linked to your Google Maps as well.

If a video exists of some unbelievable or whacky event that has occurred in your area, include that as part of the YouTube video offering. It has the potential to go "viral" and may attract enormous traffic to the business' website.

With market research showing that approximately 60 percent of users visit and use video sharing sites, having a presence and utilizing YouTube as part of any social media strategy is necessary.

## **OTHER SOCIAL NETWORKING / SOCIAL MEDIA SITES OF INTEREST**

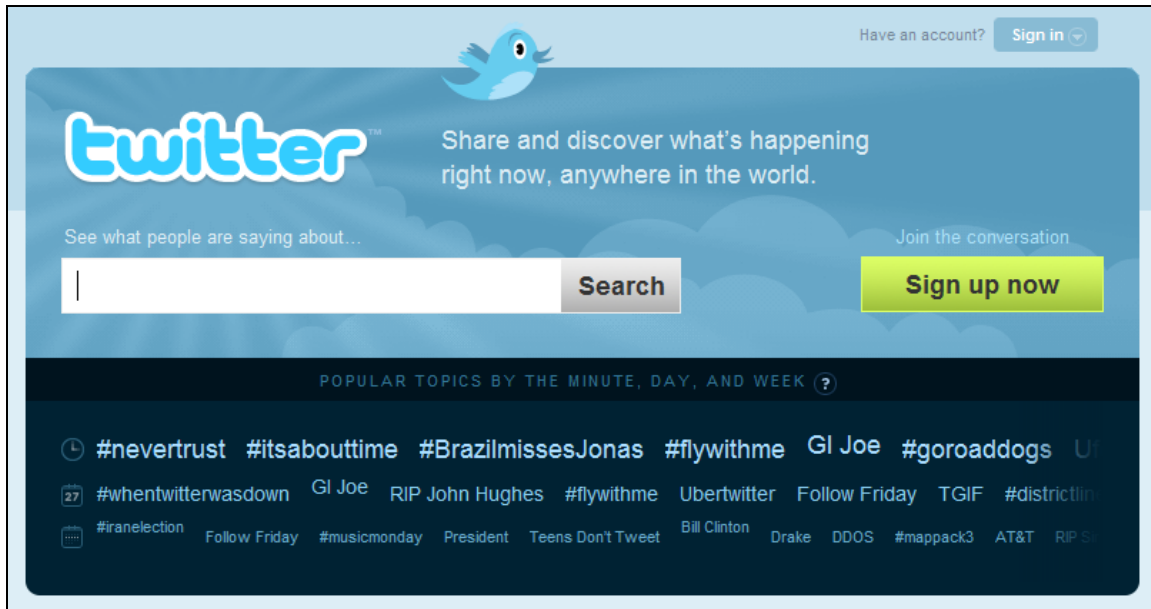
There are other social networking / social media sites that should be of interest to any travel and tourism based business. Sites such as FaceBook and Twitter allow users to connect and share information with friends and followers. Other sites such as Flickr and Picasa provide photo sharing functionality.

Blogging has also become popular and provides a medium for businesses to release information and gain authority. Blogs are websites that can be best described as online journals, giving both individuals and businesses an opportunity to publish articles and engage their readers. It is the ultimate social media platform.

Strategically integrating other forms of social networking and social media into the overall marketing campaign for a travel and tourism business have amazing potential.

## TWITTER ([WWW.TWITTER.COM](http://www.twitter.com))

Twitter is a micro blogging platform that allows users to publish short 140 character messages to instant message platforms, cell phones and the web. It is a marketers dream, opening a whole new world, allowing targeted messages known as tweets to be directed to people instantly.



What is the marketing potential of Twitter?

In examining the very nature of Twitter it is obvious that this social networking and social media site is about delivering opinions, events, news and ideas to users who opt to follow other users. Twitter is basically opt-in marketing where users elect to receive updates on things they themselves deem important.

How is Twitter becoming a marketer's dream medium?

The answer is simple. Using Twitter, marketers can push messages to capitalize on current events. It is a mechanism for self promotion but more importantly it requires user engagement!

Twitter allows messages to be delivered directly to users via mobile devices. With desktop computers numbering approximately 1.2 billion and the number of cellular phones being used is approximately 3 billion, Twitter has the potential to reach approximately 300 percent more people than traditional internet marketing. The sheer size of the potential user-base is what makes Twitter marketers' dream come true!

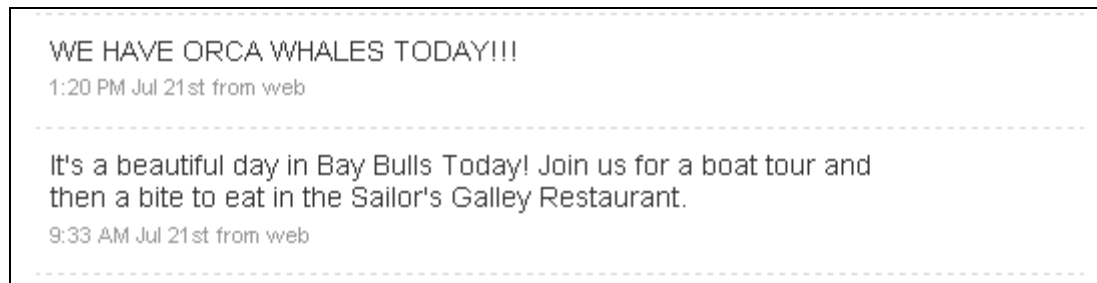
Combine this with user engagement and the potential for any business, not just the travel and tourism industry is enormous.

The power of Twitter for marketing can be realized by tracking and directing the attention of the users. It not only allows travel and tourism companies to deliver the

message directly to the user but allows the monitoring how the message is used. Marketers can get a feel for what is working in the promotion of a company.

For the travel and tourism industry, this type of engagement means having an ability to provide real-time and up-to-date information immediately, capitalizing on the interest that other users have in the product/service offering because these users have elected to follow the Twitter stream.

For example, a local whale watching and boat tour company uses Twitter to notify potential customers when whales are spotted on tours. A sample tweet that they use to generate interest looks like the one shown below.



Any potential customer following this tour operators Twitter update stream would see that there are Orca whales being spotted on the tours and that the weather is great. An update such as this may spark interest and result in a spontaneous purchase simply because it is delivered in real-time to mobile devices.

Presenting businesses with a mechanism to connect with current and potential customers, Twitter helps promote brand recognition and build brand loyalty. Again, the power of Twitter with respect to branding is harnessed because it allows for a penetration directly into the lives of participants, delivered directly through a medium they have grown accustomed to using.

In its most obvious marketing potential, Twitter can be used to generate traffic to a website. With the inclusion of links in a message, Twitter can direct visitors to a specific website. Carefully constructed messages can become viral, resulting in enormous traffic numbers for a website in a relatively short period of time.

Unlike social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter marketing involves two-way audience engagement. Tweets tend to be more conversational and require the business to take an active role in the relationship it is building with followers. Messages containing pure promotional content can be weaved with more generic messages to keep the Twitter updates rather informal.

What's the downside of using Twitter for marketing?

To be honest, Twitter messages can be perceived as being a distraction from regular business operations. Using Twitter requires investing time and attention. There is a necessity to be "connected" whether to the Internet or through a wireless device such as a cell phone. Regardless, of how long it takes to read or respond to a Twitter message, it does take time.

Even with this shortcoming, Twitter should be recognized and embraced for exactly what it is – a marketing goldmine that is waiting to be tapped. Embrace Twitter correctly and enthusiastically – it has major marketing potential.

Twitter in Plain English (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddO9idmax0o>) provides a great overview of this micro-blogging platform.

### **FLICKR (WWW.FLICKR.COM) AND PICASA (WWW.PICASAWEB.COM)**

Both Flickr and Picasa are web-based photo sharing sites that allow individuals and businesses an opportunity to share their pictures across the Internet. For the travel and tourism industry, having an opportunity to present a visual representation of products and services will dramatically increase visibility.

The major search engines index images from these services and if utilized properly as part of a social marketing campaign, the potential to drive targeted traffic to a website is amazing.

### **BLOGGING**

Recognizing the power of a blog to build a business is perhaps one of the most important items in today's economy. The internet has altered the landscape in many ways, evolving markets into vast and ever expanding realms that reach across international borders. Using a blog to build (or expand) a business allows companies to reach a more connected demographic and effectively target specific areas of a market.

Additionally, internet focused marketing campaigns provide mechanisms for immediate feedback. Companies can quickly examine the impact of marketing efforts and adjust accordingly as feedback is instantaneous.

How can a company use a blog to build business in the travel and tourism industries?

It has to be said that a blog does not guarantee success in business. It is however, a means to having a successful business, recognized in its occupied niche as both a leader and innovator. The use of a blog for business requires time and effort, but has the potential to have major rewards if utilized effectively.

A business blog has an ability to allow a company to:

- Demonstrate an expertise in a given area;
- Provide SEO benefit through relevant and fresh content;
- Create a recognized knowledge base in a given subject area;
- Create transparency and openness in a given area;
- Interact with potential customers; and
- Establish a company history

Blogging itself can be used to make money, but this road will prove to be difficult unless you already have a large readership and are somewhat famous. With that being said, blogging is an effective way to market and provide exposure to a business (as shown).

Concentrate on the benefits that a blog can offer a business and once established, it can become another source of revenue.

Businesses can create a blog easily and for free. Sites such as WordPress ([www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)) and Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)) offer free blogging platforms that can be used to promote a business, provide general comments on a particular topic or happening related to a business or to provide information directly to customers.

The key to successful blogging is effective content and regular updates. Having regularly updated articles posted to a blog is the key to attracting and maintaining a following. If utilized successfully, blogging can become an effective marketing tool for the travel and tourism industry.

### **FACEBOOK ([WWW.FACEBOOK.COM](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM))**

Facebook is a social networking site that contains nearly 120 million users worldwide. People using Facebook first started using the social network to connect or reconnect with friends. The service quickly became one of the premier social networks during the Web 2.0 revolution.

Facebook allows for the creation of pages that allows businesses to share information about products and services with Facebook users. These pages can be promoted with Facebook ads to attract fans.

The screenshot shows the Facebook Pages interface. At the top, there are navigation links for Advertising, Pages, Lexicon, Share, and Connect. The main heading is "Facebook Pages" with a "Create a Page" button and a link to "or login to manage existing Pages". Below this is a navigation bar with tabs for Overview, Prepare, Step By Step, and Find New Fans. The main content area is divided into three columns: 1. "Create a Facebook Page" with a description and a link to "download our Product Guide". 2. "Start the Conversation" with a description and a link to "Write another comment...". 3. "Drive Customer Awareness" with a description and a link to "Facebook Ads".

Travel and tourism businesses can also establish online profiles and create groups that other Facebook users can join. Take advantage of the link sharing, photo sharing, and conversational aspect of Facebook. Make "friends" and build relationships as with any other social network.

Facebook groups allow users with same interest to share information. It provides the travel and tourism industry an opportunity to gain trust in the online world. These groups can be used to promote, not spam, events and happenings related to the travel and tourism area targeted, as well as promote the business itself.

Remember that it is the relationship and the engagement in that relationship that will build trust, credibility and ultimately lead to sales.

### **SOME FINAL WORDS**

Social networking and social media are real, providing an opportunity for travel and tourism operators to engage and build relationships with customers. The intimate nature of social media when used in this fashion makes it a perfect fit for this industry.

Social networking and social media cannot be ignored. Consumers have become disillusioned with traditional marketing and advertising, valuing the opinions of other consumers much more than advertisers. Businesses with a sense to capitalize on social networking and social media will be successful.

The travel and tourism industry can benefit from the relationships built via social networking and social media as the industry tends to be more intimate and consumers value comments from likeminded consumers. Establishing an industry trust through social networking and social media has potential to pay major dividends. The relationships may not convert to immediate sales but as trust increases in this industry through positive relationships, conversions will happen.

The travel and tourism industry has to capitalize on social networking and social media. To do so gives any competition building a successful social marketing strategy a leg up.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Barry Wheeler is a business owner, blogger and self-professed geek that blogs at [www.barrywheeler.ca](http://www.barrywheeler.ca), is a site dedicated to making money online, business, technology and Internet news.

Barry runs several websites related to a variety of topics with many of his sites developed through interest in a variety of topics.

A self-professed geek, Barry's computer experience began early at the age of 15 when he received a Tandy TRS 80 Color Computer as a Christmas gift. Hooked from the start, he learned to program in Assembly and Basic and later expanded his computer knowledge throughout the remainder of high school and College, completing technology degree in Business Computer Studies. After continuing to develop his programming skills to include languages such as RPG, COBOL, C++ and Visual Basic, he quickly jumped on the Internet bandwagon as it emerged through the early 1990s but is the first to admit that he had not realized the commercial and money making potential of the Internet.

Playing catch-up and utilizing a strong background in running a successful computer consulting business, Barry has concentrated on developing an online presence for his businesses including web hosting, Internet marketing, search engine optimization and social media.

Giving back to the community, Barry has developed the Social Networking and Social Media for Tourism Guide.

Visit Barry online at his blog Marketing, Technology and Business News – Where Geeks Can Be Geek – <http://www.barrywheeler.ca>. You can also follow Barry on Twitter – <http://www.twitter.com/barrywheeler>.