

Best Practices

Best Practices in Mobile Marketing for Destinations

By Megan Gilliland, League of Kansas Municipalities

Research shows 67% of digital media is consumed using a mobile application. The use of smartphones, tablets and mobile applications has revolutionized how Americans receive their information as well as the content received. Smartphone apps have become the primary access vehicle to the internet, representing half of the total digital media time spent. On average, millennials spend 93 hours per month on their smartphone apps whereas, across the generations, Americans spend 73 hours per month using smartphone apps. So, what does this mean for your city's destination or attraction? Make sure you're heavily using digital media in your marketing program and figuring out ways to use applications like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, YouTube, Pinterest and emerging apps to reach your future (and current) customers. No matter what social media platforms you choose to use, make sure to monitor and engage with followers to create a digital relationship.

A traveler's decision-making process generally follows these six steps: Inspiration, Planning, Comparing, Transaction, Travel, and Post Travel. According to a study commissioned by Google in 2014, 65% of leisure travelers reported they turn to the web early in the travel process. Talking to friends, family and colleagues plays a large part in suggesting travel ideas as the inspiration for a trip. The internet, television and magazines/newspapers still play a role but to a lesser degree than online sources. Using YouTube and search engines to research travel sites were listed as top online sources of inspiration. Google's study also notes that leisure travelers increasingly turn to search engines when booking car rentals, air travel and overnight accommodations. The graphic to the right provides tips to garner attention from leisure travelers using mobile apps.

Once a traveler has completed their trip, hopefully you've created a travel ambassador versus detractor. Make sure you've collected electronic data from your customer to communicate and encourage repeat trips or positive word-of-mouth referrals. Collect data through satisfaction surveys and encourage customers to follow you on your social media profiles. Through your new digital relationship, encourage satisfied travelers to share their positive experiences on various social media.



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Sources:

- 1 comScore 2016 U.S. Mobile App Report.
- 2 <http://fredericgonzalo.com/en/2015/05/27/social-media-best-practices-in-travel-marketing-new-book/>
- 3 https://think.storage.googleapis.com/docs/2014-travelers-road-to-decision_research_studies.pdf

Facebook: Facebook can provide direct access to your potential customers both organically and through paid advertising. With Facebook's expansion into video through Facebook Live, attractions can grow their reach within the app using video. Facebook posts are easily shareable which increases engagement of posts. When using Facebook, always use photos or videos to increase viewership of posts. Investing a small amount of your marketing budget into advertising on Facebook can pay off in the long run if you're using targeted ads to reach customers who have already identified a pre-disposition to favoring certain types of interests. Facebook also allows easy cross-sharing of information by similar organizations and collaborators. Tagging sponsors, attractions, similar organizations, etc. can increase engagement and reach of your posts. Facebook also offers free analytics to analyze how your posts are performing.

Instagram: Similar to the benefits of Pinterest, Instagram is a visually-rich social media platform. Visitors can easily share their travel adventures and tips via Instagram. Since Instagram is a visual platform, quality photos of your attractions are essential. Embrace user-generated content to share your story through another's eyes – this creates engagement and builds your relationship with the Instagrammer.

Pinterest: Think of Pinterest as a digital corkboard. Users can upload, save, sort and manage images, video and other media content (known as pins) using this application. Organizations can add a "pin it" button on their website which allows visitors to add pins to their boards for leisure travel in the future. Also consider creating a Pinterest profile for your city where you post pin-able items for visitors to share and follow. In your Pinterest profile, make sure to post images of local attractions, parks, festivals, restaurants, special events and information about your community.

SnapChat: Snapchat is a photo messaging application, where users can take photos and videos (called snaps) and send them to a controlled audience. SnapChat's main defining difference in the social media world is that it offers complete privacy. The user can send a snap to their close friends – like a text – but the snap will disappear forever after the recipient opens it or the user can upload snaps to their Snap Story, which can be viewed by a larger audience. SnapChat offers users the ability to create geofilters (like an overlay to put over your photo) – what a great way to get your brand identity shared on social media! SnapChat is also beneficial for providing coupons to visitors or followers and for hashtag campaigns.

Twitter: Twitter is a fast-moving, 140-character maximum messenger that works especially well with hashtags, photos and links. Twitter posts have a much shorter lifespan than other social media posts. No, that doesn't mean messages disappear after time, but close monitoring and quick response are needed to be active on Twitter. Create hashtags for your destination or attraction and encourage your local businesses or tourism sponsors to use hashtags to boost their searchability. Twitter is a great place to create a digital personality by re-tweeting and responding to potential visitors.

YouTube: Every day, one billion hours of video content is watched on YouTube. YouTube reaches more 18-49 year-olds than any cable network in the U.S. Create a YouTube channel for your destination or attraction to capture a tiny fraction of those billion-a-day hours. Post customer testimonials from special events, preview new attractions and offer video tours of the community.

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