



# DIGITAL TOURISM THINK TANK

WWW.THINKDIGITAL.TRAVEL

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

YAHOO!

## 5 LEVELS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SOPHISTICATION FOR DMOS

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

William Bakker, Chief Strategist from Think! Social Media explains the concept of social media sophistication: Social is at the core of everything and the starting point when it comes to helping a destination. Tourism experience and social brands are more and more shaped by what people are saying about a destination and the experiences that people have will shape the stories that are being told. These stories that people tell will ultimately build brands in the people that are listening. In social media there are a lot of people talking, people love to talk about their trips. In general, the conversation has moved away from brands to individuals and Tourist Boards need to respond to that.

Having this understanding about social media in mind, 5 Levels can be identified that best describes destination's level of social media sophistication.



Produced in partnership with  
**Think!** SOCIAL  
MEDIA

# FIVE LEVELS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SOPHISTICATION



## LEVEL 1 - IGNORING SOCIAL MEDIA

This level represents DMOs who are not active at all in social media. Social media is seen more as a threat than an opportunity.

### Characteristics you can find at this level are:

- Leadership that is very skeptical of social media ("Facebook is a waste of time," "I don't care what my old high school buddy had for dinner last night," "Twitter is for young people," etc.)
- Fear of negativity
- Restricted staff access to social networking sites through policies or technology
- Lack of an internal social media champion
- Lack of social media knowledge at marketing agencies



## LEVEL 2 - EXPERIMENTING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

DMOs experiment with social media without a specific strategy through random tactics.

### Characteristics you can find at this level are:

- Leadership that is skeptical, does not know activities are happening, ignores them because of disinterest, allows it because an influential stakeholder asked questions, or is swamped dealing with politics
- Fear of negativity and overreaction when something "bad" happens
- Enthusiastic internal champions who have created rogue accounts but sometimes lack skills to properly execute. These people eventually leave the organisation to properly grow their skills elsewhere
- Hit or miss results
- Chasing anything that is new and hot
- Lack of social media knowledge at marketing agencies
- No or very little budget
- No metrics



## LEVEL 3 - SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPORTING MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

Due to a lack of strategic knowledge, DMOs incorporate social media in paid, outbound marketing campaigns. Often this is an add-on to traditional marketing campaigns, such as a YouTube channel showing videos originally made for TV or using Facebook and Twitter to broadcast campaign messaging.

### Characteristics you can find at this level are:

- Leadership that realizes social media can be powerful but still relies/insists on traditional methods because they are more comfortable with them, or do not know how to measure and compare the difference in results



# FIVE LEVELS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SOPHISTICATION

- Marketing agencies that reluctantly incorporate social into campaign strategies, often as an afterthought and/or without understanding social media principles
- Little integration or collaboration with members/partners/industry
- Heavy scheduling and approval processes for social media activity
- Broadcast-style communication in social media
- Viewing and communicating with fans and followers in a traditional outbound marketing way, such as a consumer email database
- Year-round efforts on Twitter, Facebook, etc., that lack strategic direction
- Social media black-outs when there is no campaign in market
- Frustrated and/or maxed-out staff who understand the potential of social media but are not heard by leadership and sometimes need/want more training
- Often staff skilled in social media leave the organisation out of frustration
- Budget that is a small portion of marketing campaigns
- Lack of appropriate metrics, with success often measured either by big numbers (# of fans/followers) or a campaign's level of creativity

Most DMOs operate at this level, sometimes with some additional effort to keep Facebook and Twitter going year-round. Often the level of success depends on the sophistication of one or two staff members.

DMOs at this level want to succeed but cannot break out of the traditional way of doing business. Getting to level four is usually achieved by having a strong social media success as part of a bigger initiative or having an epiphany that social requires a different way of thinking. Usually, level two experiments continue alongside level three activity.



## LEVEL 4 - FOLLOWING A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

This level is typified by a DMO having a social media strategy in place or having social media integrated into its marketing strategy. The DMO still believes that it is in full control of the destination brand.

### Characteristics you can find at this level are:

- Leadership that understands social media and has given it dedicated resources
- Marketing campaigns that have social at the core
- Agencies in place that are dedicated to social or a digital agency that (really) gets social
- Social strategies in place tied to marketing goals and objectives
- Stronger alignment/integration with members/partners/industry and other stakeholders
- A move from mass to niche marketing
- Activities that are measured and adjusted in real time
- Staff that is trained in social media
- Empowered staff that is allowed and encouraged to participate as a DMO professional in social networks
- Social media monitoring and engagement that is in collaboration with members/partners/industry
- Social media that is incorporated in customer service
- Relaxed social media access policies and limited approvals for posting content



# FIVE LEVELS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SOPHISTICATION

- Crisis plan in place
- Systematic experimentation that is part of the strategy
- Dedicated staff and budget for social media

Leading DMOs have entered this level. Over the next few years we expect a rush of DMOs moving here. DMOs that enter level four first are the ones with less restraining operating environments (such as funding) with innovative leaders and marketing managers.



## LEVEL 5 - EMBRACING THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUSINESS MODEL

The level five DMO starts with the core of the passions that make a destination relevant and leads all partners that have an impact on those experiences. The sole focus is on delivering outstanding visitor experiences that are unique to the destination, and then making it easy for visitors to share these experiences in their own voices.

As painful as it may be, the DMO re-organises, ending much of its old way of doing business. Staff is re-trained and assigned to new activities.

### Characteristics you can find at this level are:

- Leadership that understands that business models from 15 years ago must change and is willing to undertake the pain of changing the organisation
- Relentless focus on the consumer
- Majority of marketing resources are allocated to digital
- A shift from destination marketing to destination management, where the customer experience is seen as the primary way to build brand
- Marketing strategies that are a collaborative effort between the DMO, industry, residents, passionate consumers and other stakeholders
- A move from mass marketing to niche marketing
- Culture of collaboration, internally as well as with members/partners/industry and even consumers
- Flattened organizational hierarchy to increase efficiency and speed needed to respond and adjust quickly
- Lean processes
- Staff that is trained, empowered and supported to make decisions without requiring lengthy approvals or spending time in meetings designed by management to control every aspect of every tactic

We're not aware of any DMOs at level five. We have spoken to many DMO executives who know they need to get here and want to get here. Often, their funding models or destination-specific politics stand in the way.

The DMO closest to a level five we are familiar with is Visit Sørlandet in Southern Norway. As a newly created regional DMO, this organisation quickly realised it would be impossible to build a Southern Norway brand the traditional way. By creating a strategy based on collaborating with local DMOs and industry members to improve the visitor experience and elevate the collective digital marketing efforts, Visit Sørlandet is building its brand through every touchpoint while growing repeat visitation and encouraging word-of-mouth.

For many DMOs that have not reached level four, level five may seem pie in the sky. But the further you move your DMO through the levels, the more you realise just how much the world has changed and the true impact this has. Once you enter level four, you can see level five. It is no longer pie in the sky. It is tomorrow.



# SOCIAL MEDIA TAKEAWAYS?

- DMOs need to understand in which level they are
- Social needs to be at the core of everything!
- Social media is not about broadcasting – it is about engaging with travellers, local industry and operators
- Raising the bar of knowledge within the entire DMO to achieve the “Aha-Moment”
- It is all about managing the end-to-end experience in social media rather than big marketing campaigns



## ABOUT WILLIAM BAKKER

William is a partner at Think! Social Media and has worked with hundreds of destinations to develop successful social media campaigns and strategies. A well established keynote speaker, William has spoken at the industry's leading conferences in North America, Europe and the rest of the world.

William worked for ten years as e-Marketing Manager at Tourism British Columbia before joining Think! and is one of the industry's thought leaders in social media

# Think! SOCIAL MEDIA

## EXCLUSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PARTNER

Think Social Media is a boutique digital marketing agency with a laser-focus on the tourism industry and its roots in social media. We have an exceptional team with diverse experience across strategy, creative, and technical services as well as strong relationships with specialised contractors and agency partners. Our team works with DMOs, CVBs, and tourism businesses across the world to help create better products and experiences.



## THE DIGITAL TOURISM THINK TANK REPORTS AND BEST PRACTICE

The Digital Tourism Think Tank is a new initiative which aims to provide a platform for knowledge exchange, best practice, events and workshops and benchmarking for the tourism industry.

The Think Tank is supported by Yahoo! and designed specifically to support the work of CEOs, Marketing Managers and e-Marketing Managers working in DMOs who are responsible for creating engaging and inspiring digital campaigns.