

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: A BEST PRACTICES ANALYSIS OF
SELECTED DESTINATION MAGAZINES

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: A BEST PRACTICES ANALYSIS OF SELECTED DESTINATION MAGAZINES

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Social media is rapidly becoming one of the most efficient, wide-reaching and successful forms of marketing used by organizations all over the world. Destination magazines, for example, offer a wide variety of services and products, and one of the most effective ways to reach loyal customers as well as potential customers is through social media outlets. The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of social media marketing techniques amongst Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine. The instrument used was a checklist and matrix that were developed to analyze the most effective use of each social media outlet. Data were collected from each of the magazine's websites and their social media outlets. The results indicated that Twitter is the most commonly utilized outlet, visuals play a considerable role in drawing in consumers, and almost all social media sites should be connected back to Facebook to maximize the use of this outlet. This study can be utilized as a foundation for future research in order to determine shifts in trends and rate of success of social media as a marketing technique.

Keywords: social media, marketing, strategies, destination magazines, trends

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	v
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	1
Background of Study.....	1
Review of Literature.....	2
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions	8
Delimitations.....	9
Chapter 2 METHODS.....	10
Description of Context	10
Description of Instrument.....	11
Description of Procedures	12
Chapter 3 PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS.....	14
Demographics	14
Sunset Magazine: Use of Social Media.....	15
Travel + Leisure Magazine: Use of Social Media	17
Coastal Living Magazine: Use of Social Media.....	18
Chapter 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	21
Summary.....	21
Discussion.....	22

Conclusions.....	26
Recommendations.....	27
REFERENCES	28
APPENDIXES	32
Appendix A	33
Checklist.....	34
Matrix.....	35

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
TABLE 1. Sunset Magazine By Social Media Posts from June-October 2013 According to Frequency.....	16
TABLE 2. Travel + Leisure Magazine By Social Media Posts from June-October 2013 According to Frequency.....	17
TABLE 3. Coastal Living Magazine By Social Media Posts from June-October 2013 According to Frequency.....	18

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

In the past decade, social media has become one of the most popular marketing techniques used by businesses worldwide. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) identify social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61). As technology continues to rapidly replace many forms of advertising and marketing, more companies are choosing to utilize the vast amount of social media outlets to reach their customers. Facebook, for example, was created in 2004 and initially meant for Harvard University Alumni (Junghun, Choonseong, Byungun & Youngjoon, 2013). It was made accessible to the public in 2006, and by 2011 it exceeded 7 billion members (Junghun et al.). This example is a dramatic one, as Facebook has become one of the most well known and frequently used outlets since its creation, but the idea is simple: people are excited about social media.

Due to the abundance of social media channels that are available for almost anyone to use at no cost, companies now have an added challenge when it comes to marketing their products or services. In the past few years, many companies have begun straying away from advertising their products online and are instead “promoting their Facebook pages and Twitter accounts” (Newman, 2011). While the ultimate objective is to sell a product or service, the companies who are employing social media outlets are going a step further. By choosing to join the social media bandwagon, these companies

now have the opportunity to build relationships with consumers by understanding and identifying their wants and needs.

Essentially, these companies have the ability to cater a product or service to the specifications of what is desired by the customers who join the discussions by means of social media. Baird and Parasnis (2011) stated, “Social media holds enormous potential for companies to get closer to customers and, by doing so, facilitate increased revenue, cost reduction and efficiencies.” (p. 30). The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of social media marketing techniques amongst Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Premier, Proquest, ERIC, and PsycINFO. This review of literature will focus on the benefits of utilizing social media as a valuable means of marketing and advertising. It will highlight the use of four outlets in particular that will include Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter.

Directly following the election of 2012, President Barack Obama sent out his thanks to his supporters via Twitter, one of several social media outlets that has gained enormous popularity in the last few years (Tham, 2013). According to Tham, President Obama stated to his twenty-three million followers, “We’re all in this together. That’s how we have campaigned, and that’s who we are. Thank you” (p. 590). The election of

2012, also known as the “social media election” (Tham, p. 590), set an incredible standard for the use of social media as a resource for marketing and reaching a more extensive public. After the explosion of available social media outlets in 2006 and 2007 (Juhghun et. al., 2013), it’s no wonder businesses of all shapes and sizes, and all over the world, are joining the online trend to connect with customers and enhance marketing strategies through social media. However, the rate at which this new medium can change overnight is astounding, and it’s something that many companies are not used to dealing with on an everyday basis. A new social media site can be outdated instantaneously, while its competitors renovate their purpose and substance just as quickly, and as a result there is a relentless cycle of what constitutes a valuable social media outlet (Kahle & Valette-Florence, 2012). As social media is now one of the most prominent outlets for companies to market their products and services, it is crucial that they are always one step ahead of their competitors in the most innovative, original and personal marketing techniques.

One way for companies to ensure they are always one step ahead of their competition is to pursue the outlets that their consumers are using and begin to productively utilize these sites and engage with these customers. Since its appearance in 2010, it is apparent that Pinterest is one such outlet that draws in all types of people as well as businesses. According to Barnes, Lescault, and Wright (2013), “In 2012, 11 (2%) F500 [Fortune 500] companies had Pinterest accounts... that number has grown to 45 companies or 9%... half of the top 10 ranked companies have Pinterest boards...” (para. 30). It’s clear by the dramatic rise in Fortune 500 companies using Pinterest in the last year, that they see this outlet as an opportunity to reach their

customers through an online social network that is almost completely based on visuals. In the words of Peregrin (2012), “The primary thing to keep in mind is that a key function of Pinterest is to drive users to your website or blog...” (p. 1930). Pinterest may appear to be a social media site to simply ‘pin’ random pictures to boards created by the user, but it’s essential purpose is to lead that user to the website where the picture is from. It is clear that consumers are enthusiastic about what Pinterest has to offer, and that any company that engages with this outlet and its users is taking a step in the right direction towards successful marketing through this innovative network.

While social media sites are increasingly a vital part of marketing and advertising for many companies, it is important for these businesses to choose wisely when they decide which online social network (OSN) to utilize (Juhghun et. al., 2013). It is essential for a company to clearly develop the message to be communicated and the target audience that they are trying to reach (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Depending on what a company is advertising, if they are just trying to achieve a broader fan base, or if they simply want to stay in contact with loyal customers, choosing which outlet works the best for each scenario is crucial. Kaplan and Haenlein reported, “Dell, for example, states that its use of Twitter – a micro blogging application that allows sending out short, text-based posts of 140 characters or less – has generated \$1 million in incremental revenue due to sales alerts” (p. 67). Dell’s decision to employ Twitter to notify their customers of sales was observably beneficial, and more than likely a smarter business decision than using Pinterest, for example. Twitter is currently one of the most successful OSNs used by individuals as well as companies that have found it to be one of the most useful applications for their marketing and advertising strategies.

Twitter was one of many OSN applications introduced in 2006, considered to be 2nd generation, and one of the few that effectively transferred into 3rd generation (Juhghun et al., 2013). The success of many early OSNs was determined by whether or not they effectively shifted from 1st and 2nd generation (based on Web 2.0) to 3rd generation, which “became smart-device based” (Juhghun et al.). Facebook was one OSN that had an incredibly thriving transition into the 3rd generation. According to Juhghun et al., “Accessibility and portability of mobile devices provided new services such as enhanced real-time communication and collective intelligence contents” (p. 217), which are features of Facebook that allow individuals as well as consumers and businesses to build relationships almost anytime and anywhere. According to Hoffman and Novak (2012), “Every day, Facebook users generate 2.7 billion likes or comments and upload 250 million photos”(p. 69). The magnitude of Facebook has become increasingly relevant to companies who are using this social media platform as a marketing tool. Not only does Facebook offer many opportunities for companies to market their products and services, it also owns another OSN outlet – Instagram (Barnes et. al., 2013). Companies now have the ability to connect their Instagram with their Facebook, and by doing so reach a broader audience of potential customers.

The brilliance of Instagram is that it is solely based on visuals. As the old saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. According to Thomas (2012):

It’s no surprise that social platforms supporting visual content, such as Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest are now rising to the top of social media channels. An attractive, compelling image offers background, narrative, and conclusion all at a

moment's glance, delivering information, efficiency, and satisfaction to the viewer. (p. 321)

It is obvious that visuals have a huge impact on what drives traffic to certain social media outlets. The use of photographs and videos are a crucial part of marketing, and often times an illustrative set of data is just as educational as it is something nice to look at and that is what compels people to share what they find with others (Thomas). Businesses have the task of creating a foundation on which to establish how they will employ social media strategies as it is, as stated by Thomas, "becoming increasingly important as online social networking and 'social sharing' behaviors increase and as 'always-on' Internet use becomes more personal, being accessed as much or more on mobile devices" (p. 69).

Online social networks that support visuals are some of the most up and coming outlets that are being utilized by everyone, especially businesses that are employing social media as a marketing tool.

Through such OSNs, businesses have an incredible opportunity to connect with their customers on a new level. Social media has presented companies with the ability to develop long-term relationships and the potential to gain loyal customers. According to Thackeray, Neiger and Keller (2012), "Practitioners can realize social media's untapped potential by incorporating it as part of the larger social marketing strategy... Social media... may help organizations increase their capacity for putting the consumer at the focus of the social marketing process" (pp. 165-166). The consumer now holds a significant amount of power through social media. Laroche, Habibi and Richard (2013) stated that, "...social media brand based communities could cement relationships among customers, marketers, product, brand, and other customers... these relationships could

enhance brand trust and loyalty” (p. 76). It is important for companies to understand that integrating their values and goals with those of their customers has immense potential for brand growth and consumer devotion.

While OSNs offer companies countless opportunities for growth and the prospect of reaching a broader audience, one of their drawbacks is also what makes them so successful: almost every social media outlet is free of charge. This completely levels out the playing field in the sense that all companies; large or small, international or family owned, chains or a mom-and-pop shop, have the same marketing and advertising opportunities. Stuart (2013) stated, “One of the best ways to help develop a social media strategy for your brand is to assess what your competitors are doing” (para. 2). Social media has provided companies not only with the chance to correspond with their customers, but now they almost always have access to how their competition is benefiting from the social media outlets they employ. By making use of the various aspects that social media offers, businesses have the means to reach a broad range of customers, analyze their competition, and allow their customers the prospect of being heard.

Social media is quite possibly the most up and coming way for companies to engage with their customers, market their products and services, and reach a vastly more expansive audience than ever before. Khale and Valette-Florence (2012) stated:

Social media share key characteristics that lend themselves to advertising, marketing, and lifestyle studies; these include interactivity, the potential for widespread distribution (but conversely the potential to be highly targeted), democracy of content (often without edits), an experiential format, relatively low cost, and alterability. (p. 237)

All of the facts stated above about social media are merely the foremost beneficial characteristics of this new medium. The companies that are deciding to pursue this new method of marketing and advertising are leading the way into the future of online social networking. The revolution of social media is changing the culture of marketing and advertising, and along with it the relationship between consumers and businesses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of social media marketing techniques amongst Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What marketing practices do Sunset, Travel + Leisure, and Coastal Living Magazine employ on Facebook?
2. What marketing practices do Sunset, Travel + Leisure, and Coastal Living Magazine employ on Instagram?
3. What marketing practices do Sunset, Travel + Leisure, and Coastal Living Magazine employ on Twitter?
4. What marketing practices do Sunset, Travel + Leisure, and Coastal Living Magazine employ on Pinterest?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information on social media was gathered from academic journal articles through the Kennedy Library article database.
2. The number of followers on each social media site, rate of activity on each outlet, and type of content were analyzed.
3. Data were collected during the fall of 2013.
4. Information for this study was gathered utilizing Internet research as well as a checklist and matrix developed to compare best practices among the three destination magazines.

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of social media marketing techniques amongst Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine. This chapter includes the following sections: description of context, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

Description of Context

The material for this research was collected from three destination magazines websites based in the United States: Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine. The researcher also analyzed each of the magazines social media outlets. The best practices of marketing by means of social media were examined for each of the aforementioned magazines. Sunset Magazine currently reaches about “4.5 million affluent Western consumers” (Sunset, 2013), and hosts many events on the west coast as well as programs such as the Sunset Home Program and Sunset Wine Club. According to Lane, “the uniquely Western regional and socio-economic conditions have given impetus to the evolution of prominent demographics that have further set the West apart from the rest of the U.S...” (para. 14). The specificity of this region as Sunsets main reader population largely reflects the type of marketing techniques that this magazine employs. Coastal Living Magazine caters to a more vast reader population with feature stories and travel tips ranging from Hawaii to Alaska and coastal Mexico to the Caribbean islands (Coastal Living, 2013). Travel + Leisure Magazine is even more

expansive and offers more exclusive and elaborate travel guides to Europe, U.S. + Canada, Asia, Caribbean and Latin America, to name a few (Travel + Leisure, 2013). There are many other destination magazines such as Global Traveler, National Geographic Traveler, Outside Magazine and several more that offer similar travel guides and lifestyle articles that are all connecting to their consumers through social media. The market for these types of magazines can include experienced world travelers, traveling families, business travelers, inexperienced one time only travelers and many more.

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a best practices checklist and matrix developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The initial checklist was divided into a shorter checklist and a matrix that were created by choosing the most prominent features of popular social media marketing and narrowing down the list to those important to the outlets that were directly relevant to the study. The fluidity of the instrument allowed the researcher to add or take away items on the checklist and matrix as seen fit. The researcher generated the checklist and matrix based on the review of literature as well as the rate at which certain social media sites were gaining popularity, especially as a tool for marketing. A notes section was added to the checklist in order to give additional information on each of the magazine's marketing strategies within the particular website.

The final instrument included a checklist and matrix based on various interactions with social media in order to ensure the most accurate results. The researcher developed and adjusted the checklist and matrix by choosing and analyzing the websites and social media outlets of three destination magazines that were not used in the study. The first

draft of the instrument was tested through a pilot study on October 25, 2013 using websites, as well as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest accounts of three magazines that were not used in the actual study. Based on the results of the pilot study, the instrument was revised by eliminating some items on the checklist that were regarded as irrelevant (i.e., whether or not the magazine had a mobile application), as well as deciding to divide the checklist into a shorter checklist and separate matrix in order to allow for more clarity.

Description of Procedures

The data for this research were collected from three destination magazines websites based in the United States: Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine. Each of the magazines' social media outlets pertinent to the study were also analyzed. The magazines were selected by the researcher and each magazine's website as well as each outlet (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, & Pinterest) were evaluated individually. The instrument utilized in this study was a best practices checklist and matrix developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The researcher employed the use of an Excel spreadsheet in order to document the process of examining the individual magazines best practices as determined by each item on the checklist and matrix. The results were presented in a qualitative and quantitative format in order to account for the results of the matrix and checklist as well as the notes section.

The researcher conducted an analysis of each of the three websites and each magazines specific social media sites during the two weeks of the results phase of the research (October 29, 2013- November 11, 2013). The process of analysis was conducted

three separate times utilizing the first checklist for each magazine's website, and then conducted once more, utilizing the matrix, for each magazine based on each social media outlet, and then each outcome was evaluated based on the criteria met on the checklist and matrix.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of social media marketing amongst Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine and Coastal Living Magazine. A best practices approach was utilized to examine the use of social media as a marketing tool for destination magazines. This chapter includes the following sections: demographics, Sunset Magazine: use of social media, Travel + Leisure Magazine: use of social media, and Coastal Living Magazine: use of social media.

Demographics

Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine all cater to a relatively specific reader. Travelers of all kinds, homemakers looking for “do it yourself” projects, gardening tips, and many more topics are what draw readers to these destination magazines. Many of the readers of Sunset in this Western region are generally more educated and have a higher income than the general population of the rest of the United States. On the contrary, many differences of the West, including random earthquakes, water shortages, and traffic congestion are issues that Sunset has undertaken alongside their readers in order to help them deal with these inevitable environmental dilemmas.

Coastal Living Magazine caters to a larger audience of readers that either resides near or is simply enchanted by the shoreline. This magazine reaches the coasts of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf shores of North America as well as Hawaii, Alaska, coastal

Canada and Mexico, and the multi-national Caribbean Islands and U.S. Great Lakes. Readers of Coastal Living Magazine have access to dream destinations, coastal news, products, events, and decoration ideas that center on shoreline features as well as stories that focus on local waterfront communities. Coastal Living commemorates the uniqueness of living on the coast and offers travel tips, destination guides, and coastal elements distinct to each waterfront.

Travel + Leisure Magazine is based out of New York and caters to just about anyone that is looking for insight on travel destinations anywhere in the world for almost any occasion including family travel, romantic getaways, business travel, beach getaways and numerous more. Tips for planning trips, articles on a variety of getaways, and photos of practically any destination imaginable are some of what Travel + Leisure offers its array of readers.

Sunset Magazine: Use of Social Media

Sunset Magazine currently employs Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest as a part of their marketing strategy. The homepage of Sunset's website has a feature for each of the social media outlets; a "like us" option for Facebook, a "follow us" option for Instagram, a "follow us" option for Twitter, and a "follow us" option for Pinterest, all accessible on a tool bar at the bottom of the page. Each social media outlet was analyzed by the researcher to determine the following: whether or not visuals (in the form of picture and/or video) were utilized, if the account was updated weekly, the average number of posts per month (determined by the months of June, July, August, September

and October 2013), as well as the number of followers as of November 9, 2013 (See Table 1).

Table 1

Sunset Magazine by Social Media Posts from June-October 2013 According to Frequency

Social Media Sites	June	July	August	September	October
Facebook	11	14	07	15	57
Instagram	44	18	19	38	23
Twitter	212	179	206	205	174

The average number of posts per month on Sunset’s Facebook page was 20.8, and as of November 9, 2013, Sunset’s Facebook account had 111,655 “likes”, or page followers. The average number of posts per month on Sunset’s Instagram was 28.4. As of November 9, 2013, Sunset’s Instagram account had 36,519 followers. The average number of posts on Sunset’s Twitter account was 195.2, and as of November 9, 2013, Sunset’s Twitter account had 52,985 followers. Sunset’s Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter all employed the use of stimulating visuals in the form of photographs and videos.

Sunset’s Pinterest account utilizes a variety of photographs that provide links to outside websites including their own, as well as a link directly to their Twitter account. The nature of Pinterest did not allow the researcher to establish when Sunset pinned each link, and therefore was unable to determine whether this account was updated weekly, or

the number of posts per month. However, based on the number of pins as well as their “pin of the day” links on their Facebook page, the researcher concluded that this account was most likely updated on a weekly basis. As of November 9, 2013, Sunset’s Pinterest account had 40,831 followers.

Travel + Leisure Magazine: Use of Social Media

Travel + Leisure Magazine currently utilizes Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest as a component of their marketing strategy. Travel + Leisure Magazines website homepage does not have a list of links to their respective social media outlets, although they can be found under the “contact us” tab. Each social media outlet was analyzed by the researcher to determine the following: whether or not visuals (in the form of picture and/or video) were utilized, if the account was updated weekly, the average number of posts per month (determined by the months of June, July, August, September and October 2013), as well as the number of followers as of November 9, 2013 (See Table 2).

Table 2

Travel + Leisure Magazine by Social Media Posts from June-October 2013 According to Frequency

Social Media Sites	June	July	August	September	October
Facebook	18	06	11	09	44
Instagram	52	50	47	41	51

The average number of posts per month on Travel + Leisure’s Facebook page was 17.6, and as of November 9, 2013, Travel + Leisure’s Facebook page had 235,118 “likes”, or page followers. The average number of posts on Travel + Leisure’s Instagram was 48.2. As of November 9, 2013, Travel + Leisure Magazine had 56,338 followers on their Instagram account. Travel + Leisure’s Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts all employed the use of visuals through photographs and videos.

The method utilized by the researcher to determine the average number of posts per month was impossible to employ for Travel + Leisure’s Twitter account, as only a certain number of past “tweets” were visible on the feed. Travel + Leisure tweeted over 660 times in the month of October, maximizing the number of observable tweets available to the researcher. As of November 9, 2013, Travel + Leisure had 567,134 followers on their Twitter account.

Travel + Leisure’s Pinterest account employs the use of many different types of photographs that provide a link directly back to their website. As mentioned before, the nature of this outlet did not allow the researcher to determine the average number of posts per month or if it was updated weekly. This outlet provided a link connecting to their Twitter account, as well as to the homepage of their website. As of November 9, 2013, Travel + Leisure’s Pinterest account had 20,777 followers.

Coastal Living Magazine: Use of Social Media

Coastal Living Magazine currently employs Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest as an element of their marketing strategy. Their homepage has a “like us” link for their Facebook page, a “follow us” link for their Twitter account, and a “follow us”

link for their Pinterest account, however they did not have a direct link to their Instagram account anywhere on their website. Each social media outlet was analyzed by the researcher to determine the following: whether or not visuals (in the form of picture and/or video) were utilized, if the account was updated weekly, the average number of posts per month (determined by the months of June, July, August, September and October 2013), as well as the number of followers as of November 9, 2013 (See Table 3).

Table 3

Coastal Living Magazine by Social Media Posts from June-October 2013 According to Frequency

Social Media Sites	June	July	August	September	October
Facebook	08	08	08	05	44
Instagram	0	0	0	19	29
Twitter	67	93	85	87	62

The average number of posts per month on Coastal Living’s Facebook page was 29. As of November 9, 2013, Coastal Living’s Facebook page had 111,965 “likes”, or page followers. The average number of posts per month on Coastal Living’s Instagram account was 9.6, and as of November 9, 2013, Coastal Living’s Instagram account had 6,357 followers. The average number of posts per month on Coastal Living’s Twitter account was 78.8, and as of November 9, 2013, the number of followers on Coastal Living’s Twitter account was 33,345.

Coastal Living's Pinterest account employs the use of photographs that all provide links directly back to their website, as well as a separate link to their Twitter account. As previously stated, the nature of Pinterest did not allow the researcher to determine if this account was updated weekly or the average number of posts per month. As of November 9, 2013 Coastal Living's Pinterest account had 33,273 followers.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The intention of this research was to determine the best practices for social media as a marketing tool among three destination magazines: Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine. The researcher examined the marketing practices used by the aforementioned magazines on each of their Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest accounts. This concluding chapter will include the following: a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, limitations, conclusions based on the research questions, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

In the past few years, social media has developed into one of the most popular mediums for companies to market their products and services. Social media has essentially become the fastest, cheapest, and most expedient way for companies to reach a more broad audience of potential consumers. This marketing tool is an incredible way for companies to reach out to customers and build relationships with them through social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest. Each of these outlets offers a variety of benefits that take marketing to a whole new level. Twitter is an application that allows users to send out messages of 140 characters or less to anyone who follows their feed, and is becoming possibly one of the most prominent and valuable marketing tools. Facebook is widely known as one of the founding social media

platforms, and offers companies a way to reach their customers through photographs, written messages, and links to outside websites such as their own Pinterest and Instagram accounts. Pinterest is one of the newer social media outlets that made its public debut in 2010. It is essentially an online scrapbook that provides photographs that are direct links to outside websites. Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, is solely based on visuals. Companies can post photographs or videos to their account that all their followers will see, as well as connect their account to Facebook, which will also allow all their Facebook fans to see what they post.

The researcher developed a checklist and matrix that were utilized to determine the best practices of social media as a marketing tool amongst Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine. Many items were examined for each magazine such as the average number of posts on all four outlets each month, whether or not visuals are used, how many followers each magazine has on each of the four outlets, and whether or not the outlet is updated on a weekly basis. The researcher utilized each of the magazines websites as well as their online social media accounts to gather results. Each of the magazines utilized all of the social media outlets that were addressed in this study, and almost all of the magazines had a feature on the homepage of their website that directed customers to their social media accounts.

Discussion

Since its debut in 2004, Facebook has exploded worldwide into a phenomenon that no person, company, or organization can possibly ignore. Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine all have a Facebook account where they

have the opportunity to connect with their customers and acquire feedback from them. Each of these magazines employs various techniques when they post to their Facebook page, including posting photographs and videos, links that will lead to outside sources such as their website or other social media accounts, and even asking questions of their followers about various topics. All of the magazines employed one concept that comes alongside the uniqueness of social media – connecting their various accounts all back to the one that appeared to have sparked the social media fire: Facebook. Through their Facebook accounts, each magazine posts links to their “pin of the day” on their Pinterest account, and connects their Instagram posts to their Facebook so that their followers on both accounts can see what they post. This is one of the most beneficial marketing tools that Facebook offers to companies that are looking to reach a broader audience, as this outlet is the most dominantly used throughout the world. Each of these magazines employs a cultured use of Facebook, but one thing Travel + Leisure and Coastal Living lack is a more personal connection with their customers. Sunset Magazine takes the time to reply to some of the comments on their posts and this is an excellent way to gain customer loyalty. Making a more personal connection by continuing a conversation started by the organization posting a photo is an excellent, and successful, marketing technique used by Sunset Magazine.

Twitter is one of the most up and coming, successful online social networks that is available for companies to employ as a marketing tool that is sure to reach a vastly wide audience. Across the board, Twitter was the most utilized social media outlet by all three magazines, with the most average posts per month as well as more than double the amount of posts per month than on any of the other outlets. Considering the fact that the

presidential election of 2012 was referred to as the “social media election” (Tham, p. 590), and that President Obama sent out a thanks to his supports via Twitter, it is safe to consider that not only is social media the trend of the moment, but also that Twitter has immense possibilities of reaching and connecting to millions of people worldwide. The nature of Twitter, only allowing users to post 140 characters or less, is very likely the reason that this particular outlet is gaining immense popularity. People are drawn to short spurts of information that they can find quickly and then move on with their lives, and that is exactly what Twitter is limited to – a cut to the chase message without all the fluff that many social media networks have crowding their feed. However, regulating the amount of times a company posts on their Twitter account is important considering how easy it is to create a short message. Travel + Leisure Magazine, for example, posted excessively to the point where it was impossible for the researcher to obtain the same results for their Twitter feed as with the other two magazines.

Instagram and Pinterest are similar in the fact that they are both based on visuals. Pinterest is a different type of social media outlet as it is not so much social as it is informative, a place where people can go to find just about anything. The brilliance behind this outlet is that the picture boards that users create provide direct links to outside sources. Each of the magazines examined in this study utilized Pinterest to it’s fullest potential for their benefit. By pinning links directly from their websites, potential customers are led straight to their website to find what it was that was pinned by the magazine, whether it was a recipe, destination, or a list of travel tips. Similarly, each of the magazines employed Instagram as a photo-sharing outlet. Again, all of the magazines connected their Instagram posts to their Facebook, allowing a broader audience the

possibility of becoming a potential customer. The nature of the dominantly visual posts on Instagram could be the reason for the correlation between the number of posts and the number of followers that each magazine has. Coastal Living had the least amount of average posts per month on Instagram (of the three magazines), and consequently the least amount of followers. Travel + Leisure had the highest average number of posts per month, and therefore the most followers, and the number of average posts per month and number of followers of Sunset Magazine fell somewhere in the middle of the previous two. It is highly likely that the number of posts on an Instagram account directly correlates to the number of followers that the user or company attracts. The results of this study were consistent with prior research. Many different companies, including destination magazines, utilize social media as a means of marketing. Each outlet analyzed by the researcher was found to be highly beneficial to each of the magazines marketing techniques.

This study was impacted by numerous limitations. The researcher in this study may have impacted the findings through subjective bias. As a consumer of many social media outlets, the researcher may have unintentionally favored certain outlets while determining the benefits of each platform. The researcher is also a resident of the Western region of the United States where Sunset Magazine is produced and specifically caters to, which may have caused a bias towards this particular magazine due to familiarity. Since research on this subject was restricted to online means, the quantity and quality of information may have been impacted. The findings in this study should not necessarily be generalized to the entire industry of destination magazines and their use of social media outlets as a marketing tool. Despite these limitations, the findings in this

study give some insight into the best practices of social media as a component of marketing for destination magazines.

Social media is an incredibly effective tool for companies to reach large audiences, gain loyal customers, and successfully market their products or services. Destination magazines offer a wide variety of services, products, travel tips, guides and so much more, and one of the most effective ways to reach loyal customers as well as potential customers is through various social media outlets. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest all offer companies many distinctive opportunities to connect to customers in a way that is highly relative to today's culture: fast-paced, innovative, and visually stimulating. The rate at which this marketing platform changes is almost constant, and the results of this study are important for predicting future marketing trends and implementing the most successful strategies through social media outlets.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine all employ the use of visuals, direct links to their websites, and posts that connect their other social media accounts with their Facebook as a marketing tool for this outlet.
2. Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine all post photographs to their Pinterest boards that link directly to their website, as well as provide a link to their Twitter account on the homepage of their Pinterest account.

3. Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine all utilize Twitter the most frequently, and as a result have the most followers on their Twitter accounts.
4. Sunset Magazine, Travel + Leisure Magazine, and Coastal Living Magazine all connect their Instagram account with their Facebook, and post both photographs and videos.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Connect all social media outlets with Facebook as a way to gain a more broad foundation of loyal and potential customers.
2. Monitor and manage the number of posts on Twitter, as it is easy to get carried away with an excessive number of posts.
3. Stay updated with up and coming trends of certain social media outlets as it is constantly changing.
4. If possible, utilize visuals on any and all social media outlets.
5. Consider implementing a marketing strategy that maintains and renovates each social media outlet as the medium continuously changes.
6. Future research should examine alterations in the nature of different social media outlets in order to determine their success and forecast inevitable changes.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A
Checklist & Matrix

Checklist

	Yes/No	Notes
Pinterest Account		
Instagram Account		
Facebook Account		
Twitter Account		
Does website homepage have “follow us” option for Pinterest?		
Does website homepage have “like us” option for Facebook?		
Does website homepage have “follow us” option for Instagram?		
Does website homepage have “follow us” option for Twitter?		

Matrix

	Instagram	Facebook	Twitter	Pinterest
Visuals (y/n)				
Updated Weekly (y/n)				
Average # of posts/month				
# Of followers as of Nov. 9, 2013				