A world of opportunity

How social media is helping Australian travel and hospitality brands stand out

Hootsuite®

Contents

Introduction

As social media transforms how people discover, consume, and share experiences, the customer journey is evolving—and the balance of power is shifting from brands to consumers.

Soon, the biggest competitive differentiator won't be product, price, or technology—it will be the customer experience.

To survive in this new world, organisations must change when, where, and how they engage by scaling up the customer experience.

That means putting social media at the core of a customer-centric, experience-led marketing strategy built around personalisation, responsiveness, and authenticity.[1]

For the travel and hospitality industry, the shift to social creates new opportunities to innovate for improved business outcomes. Every query, booking and review makes a fresh customer connection and adds to a data resource that creates a competitive advantage.

In this white paper, we highlight opportunities the social revolution has created for travel and hospitality companies, provide insights into making the most of them, and share examples from some big brands leading the way.

Transforming the customer experience with social media

The concept of an "experience economy" seems new, but was being discussed as early as 1998 in a book by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore.[2] They theorised that to cement customer loyalty and create differentiation, companies must move beyond providing goods and services to offering personalised "memorable experiences".

Twenty years later, the individual and collective public voice created by digital and social media is finally leading consumers away from consumption to experiences—just as Pine and Gilmore predicted.

This social and economic revolution is both challenging hospitality and travel organisations and creating opportunities.

The Museum of Ice Cream shows the power of a marketing strategy built around a compelling brand story, emotional engagement, and a great customer experience. And social media is the perfect channel to deliver this strategy at scale.

Business must get strategic by engaging customers on their chosen social platforms, targeting consumers as groups and individuals, and using stories to drive business growth.

For global brands, getting smart about localisation and personalisation pays huge dividends. For AccorHotels, a smart social media strategy helped grow their social following from 4.5 million to 10 million people.

> "Marketers are being tasked with crafting interactions with customers instead of mere transactions."
>
> **Billee Howard**
> Forbes Magazine Contributor[3]

Customer story: AccorHotels

With more than 4,000 hotels and 240,000 employees on five continents, using centralised social accounts for personalisation and localisation would be a logistical nightmare for AccorHotels. They wanted local engagement while maintaining a consistent global brand voice.

AccorHotels Social Desk was the answer. Created in partnership with Hootsuite, this global platform provides each AccorHotels location with social media tools, training, education, and inspirational content.

Since adopting this strategy, AccorHotels has seen social media adoption double across their hotels—and they've grown their social following from 4.5 million to 10 million people. And by monitoring requests and engaging daily on social, they've also achieved record customer satisfaction ratings.

How social is driving the customer journey

Social has crossed over from personal to business use, gradually replacing digital as the most trusted channel for brand discovery, sales, and connection.

Discovery shifts from digital to social

Digital is a vital channel for travel and hospitality. When planning a trip, the average traveller visits 28 different websites over 53 days in 76 online sessions when planning a trip. All this traffic is expanding the digital travel space by 3.8 percent every year, making it worth an estimated US$11.4 trillion by 2027.[5]

Social media will soon be the dominant consumer information source in the purchasing cycle. Already, more than four out of ten internet users already use social to research new brands or products[6]—and half of internet users use Facebook and Instagram for purchasing research.[7]

76
Average number of online research sessions per traveller

41%
of travellers use Facebook and Instagram to research purchases

US $11.4 trillion
Value of digital travel industry by 2027

Social influences conversion and consumption

When moving from discovery to purchasing, hearing what their peers say influences consumers' decisions more than brand marketing claims. As an example, 95 percent of people now report that they read online reviews before booking a hotel or restaurant.[8]

Altogether, 71 percent of consumers make purchasing decisions based on what they discover on social—and for 18-26 year-olds, that number rises to 75 percent.[9]

When the experience is over, they share their opinions on social, continuing the cycle.

Social engagement boosts connection and retention

Social's interactive engagement and personalised experiences create lasting relationships that encourage customers to stay loyal. Yet throughout the peak 2016-17 tourism season in Australia, less than 45 percent of travel and hospitality brands engaged with customers on social. And half of all hospitality brands on Instagram never converse with customers.[10]

This is a huge missed opportunity—being proactive and responsive builds trust and makes people feel more connected with brands. In fact, brands that engage with Instagram followers every 24 to 48 hours are perceived 20 percent more positively than those that don't.[11]

95%
of consumers read online reviews before booking

71%
of consumers make purchasing decisions based on social

75%
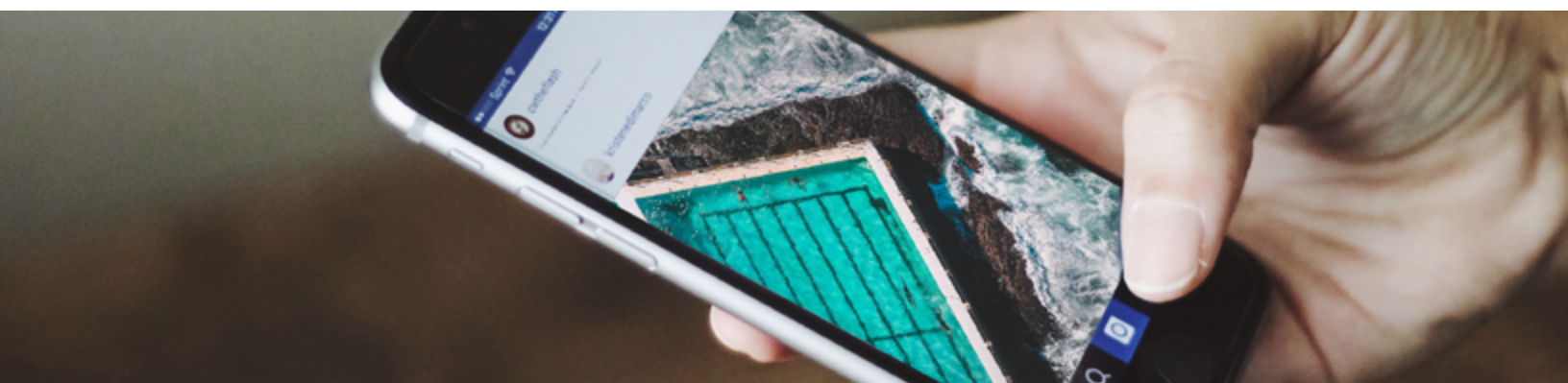of purchase decisions by 18-26 year-olds are influenced by social

<45%
of travel industry brands engage with customers on social

20%
uplift in positive perception for brands that regularly engage on Instagram

Key strategies for travel and hospitality brands to take the social advantage

With beautiful photos, engaging videos, and growing communities of travellers sharing tips and stories, social media is a perfect fit for travel and hospitality brands.

By building a social media marketing strategy that goes beyond organic reach, taps into more nuanced influencer strategies, and doubles down on social listening and engagement, you'll position your brand to stand out on social and get real business results.

1. Build your social media marketing strategy

Internet users are still turning to search engines to research products and services online, but social is quickly closing the gap. During 2017, global internet users grew by five percent, while social users grew 14 percent.[12]

It's vital to start moving social to the centre of your brand strategy, especially as social commerce takes shape and new technologies such as AI improve the customer experience. Soon, your brand's Facebook, Snapchat, or Instagram page will provide an end-to-end purchasing experience for customers, from discovery to booking management, providing numerous options for brand growth.

41%
of internet users use social media to research new brands and products

#1 Choice
16-24 year-olds prefer social to search engines for brand discovery and research

2. Boost reach by integrating organic and paid social

Facebook's 2018 change to its News Feed algorithm, which prioritised personal over public posts, marks a new era in social marketing.[13] By redefining the relationship between brands and customers, it offers new ways to strengthen it.

It's time to build a sustainable social strategy that goes beyond organic engagement on social media to add paid social and social communities to your marketing strategy. One of the outcomes will be more user-generated content that showcases authentic experiences—a valuable tool for improving engagement, as Tourism Australia understands.

See Australia: User-generated content powers Tourism Australia's campaigns

With over 1,500 pieces of content published daily using the #SeeAustralia hashtag, Tourism Australia already had a leading user-generated content (UGC) strategy on social channels. However, their small team struggled to effectively and efficiently repurpose UGC across its website, Australia.com.

Using Adobe Experience Manager Livefyre, Tourism Australia launched its new Aquatic & Coastal campaign, featuring inspiring photos and videos submitted by travellers on Australia. com. Livefyre contributed to the site's successes, which included a 66 percent increase in time on site, a more than 30 percent rise in site engagement, and a 77 percent increase in leads collected.

Learn more about Hootsuite's integration with Adobe Experience Manager and Livefyre.

3. Fine-tune your influencer partnership strategy

In 2017, for the first time, consumers trusted peers as much as technical experts and more than CEOs, governments, and academics.[14]

Marketers also began complaining about high-profile influencers, with one third[15] saying it's hard to prove their value. The introduction of influencer regulation in the United Arab Emirates further illustrates the level of unease.[16]

By contrast, peer-to-peer influence is strengthening. Half of all global internet users post online reviews every month[17] and the micro-influencer community now embraces genuine customer advocates, local communities, and employee ambassadors.

The best way to use influencers depends on your organisation and sector. Research suggests that Australian travel and hospitality brands should use major influencers to raise awareness, and minor influencers for action. Nearly 88 percent of a change in the volume of brand-related posts per user is attributable to micro-influencers.[18]

4. Deepen social listening and engagement

Today's consumers expect brands to keep on top of all reviews, content, or conversations that involve them and to regularly post on social.[19]

When hotels, bars, and restaurants publish social content every 24 to 48 hours, their TripAdvisor rankings and reviews lift by 5 percent.[20]

Tracking and posting can be time-intensive, but technology is making it easier—and faster—to manage these tasks. By integrating reputation management tools with your social management platform, you can view all online reviews, assign review-related tasks, and publish new reviews on a single platform.

33%
of respondents said being unable to prove influencer marketing ROI made social media success difficult for their brands

50%
of all global internet users post reviews online every month

87.5%
change in the volume of brand-related posts per user attributable to micro-influencers

20%
uplift in perceptions for socially active bars and restaurants

5%
increase in TripAdvisor rankings and reviews by publishing social content every 24 to 48 hours

Real-time reputation management: Australian Venue Company

With a national portfolio of restaurants, bars, and dedicated event spaces, Australian Venue Co. prides itself on offering a diverse range of venues, each with their own brand identity. Established in 2012, the team has been deliberate in acquiring well-operated venues with a focus on an exceptional gastronomic and customer experience.

As the role and impact of online online reviews on consumers' purchasing decision-making process increased, CEO Paul Waterson wanted to give the team insight into consumer feedback and empower the business to take immediate on any less-than-ideal experiences their customers were having.

Using Hootsuite and ReviewTrackers, the team implemented a process where all reviews were shared across the organisation—from marketing to operations and venue management—to validate and resolve any issues in real-time.

Learn more about ReviewTrackers and Hootsuite.

5. Use smart technology to stand out from the crowd

Marketers must get smarter about tapping into rapidly changing social technologies to get closer to customers.

Personalised content continues to grow as a trend. In a recent survey, 85 percent of respondents said customised travel itineraries were more desirable than mass-market offerings.[21] Brands that thrive will be those that constantly engage followers—online and offline— with content curated just for them.

Technology innovation is supporting these trends. Geo-targeting places location-specific content in front of consumers, and dynamic Facebook travel ads automatically promote a relevant travel inventory based on a user's interaction with your content.

How could these and new other emerging solutions meet your brand's needs?

Curated Content is King

85%

of respondents of all ages preferred customised itineraries over general ones

Proving the return on your investment in social media

Every day, social media becomes an even more powerful tool for marketers to drive real business results.

Despite occasional brand cynicism, people still like to connect with the brands that interest them on social. In an extensive global study[22] of internet users, more than a quarter turned to social networks during online product research, with this number increasing every year. The survey also found that 46 percent of all global internet users follow brands on social.

Beyond brand awareness, social can also support organisational goals throughout the customer journey such as reducing customer service costs and increasing customer retention. However, not all business leaders understand its potential. So it's important to present the value social can unlock in business terms aligned with strategic objectives and accompanied by specific, measurable KPIs.

56%
of marketers lack data and metrics to prove the ROI of social

18%
of marketing leaders in Australia do not know how to calculate the ROI of social

New strategies and tools for proving ROI

The hospitality industry measures success based on the customer experience—something that is difficult to determine with a tidy calculation. More than half the respondents of a recent survey[23] said they couldn't prove social's ROI because of limited data and metrics—and 18 percent of Australia's marketing leaders[24] lack the skills to calculate it.

However, with new strategies and tools, organisations can track customer satisfaction in ways that make sense for their business.

Establish clear goals

Before you try to measure social media ROI, you need to know what your objectives are. Are you using social media to achieve business conversions, brand awareness, customer experience, or security and risk mitigation?

To narrow your future strategy even further, establish goals based on the S.M.A.R.T framework—goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely.

If your objective is brand awareness, for example, a good goal to set would be a specific number of Instagram posts mentioning your brand for the quarter. Another example of a business conversion goal would be increasing website landing page conversion by 10 percent. You would measure this by tracking the conversion rate of people who land on the page through your social channels.

Once you know exactly why you're using social, you can start working on the how.

Measure effectively

Once you have your goals and objectives in place, you need to know which metrics to measure. Not every metric will be useful when measuring the ROI of your social efforts.

When deciding to track a specific metric, ask yourself:

- **Does it align with my objectives?** The metrics you choose to measure need to prove how social is impacting your business goals and objectives.

- **Does it help our business make decisions?** The metrics you measure should provide data that helps you make informed decisions. The right metrics should help you understand what your organisation needs to do next.

- **Do you have the capacity to measure it effectively?** If your team is lacking a critical tool, platform, or skill set, you may not be able to measure every metric in a way that adequately demonstrates its value. Without a tool like Google Analytics, for example, you won't be able to track the conversion rate of traffic pushed to your website via social.

Unite organic and paid social

To make sure you're getting a comprehensive look at your complete social media ROI, your organic social efforts need to be in sync with your paid social ad campaigns. If you measure and report on these efforts separately, you'll miss key opportunities to make data-driven decisions.

With tools like Hootsuite Impact, you can bring together a complete view of your paid and owned social media activity in one dashboard. In doing this, your organisation can easily identify what content is performing best by length of post, content type, ad spend, and ad type, and use conversion metrics like CPC (cost-per-click) and CPM (cost-per-thousand) to improve performance.

Use the right tools

The right tools can mean the difference between measuring the impact of social effectively, or completely missing the mark. The following tools can help your organisation with everything from tracking consumer actions to reporting results.

Google Analytics: Track website traffic, on-site conversions, and sign-ups originating from social media campaigns.

Hootsuite Impact: Accurately measure the ROI of social media across paid, owned, and earned social channels. Impact connects to your existing analytics systems so you can integrate social data with the rest of your business metrics. It also makes it easy to produce executive reports, and delivers plain-language recommendations to optimize your social media strategy.

Facebook Pixels: A piece of code that you place on your website, the Facebook pixel allows you to track conversions from Facebook ads—everything from leads to sales. You can use the pixel feature within Facebook's own ad platform or with social ad optimization and targeting tools like Hootsuite Ads and AdEspresso.

UTM parameters: Add these short text codes to a URL to track important data about website visitors and traffic sources. UTM parameters work with analytics programs like Google Analytics to provide a detailed picture of your social media success, from the very high level (which networks are performing best) down to the granular details (which specific post drove the most traffic to a specific page).

Proving—and improving—the value of social media to your organisation is an iterative process that your team should always be refining. With the right strategy and tools, your business can measure ROI more efficiently and get back to doing what you do best—providing the best guest experience possible.

A strategy for success: Event Hospitality & Entertainment Ltd

Event Hospitality & Entertainment Limited is one of Australia's premier entertainment, hospitality, and leisure companies. With proud and historic origins dating back over 100 years, Event's Entertainment division operates Event Cinemas in Australia and New Zealand, the State Theatre in Sydney, Moonlight Cinemas across Australia, Cinestar Cinemas in Germany, and Edge Digital Technology, while their Hospitality division operates QT Hotels & Resorts, Rydges Hotels & Resorts, and Atura Hotels brands, as well as the premier Australian Ski Resort township of Thredbo Alpine Resort.

Both divisions face their own unique business challenges—and both have adopted a social media strategy to help overcome them.

Adopting a centralised approach to social has enabled both business groups to access the data needed to measure success, improve performance, inform content strategy, and visualise industry trends internally. Hospitality division achieved this through a seamless customer-focused engagement strategy, creating an alert system for on-site influencers to gain visibility into online discussions about its brands. For the Entertainment team, increasing the visibility and consistency of paid-ad performance metrics across franchised locations has enabled them to inform better media buying decisions.

Five best practices for social media marketing success

Follow these five best practices to develop a social media strategy that you can connect to real, measurable outcomes for your organisation.

1. Align with your organisation's key objectives

Collecting social data on brand awareness won't be valuable if customer retention is your company's biggest challenge. Know what matters most to your organisation and connect social media data relevant to those business outcomes, such as repeat customer numbers.

2. Measure in terms of business value

After defining what social media will help your organisation achieve, decide how to measure your success Choose metrics that align with your objectives, that support informed decision-making, and that you have the tools, platform, and skills to measure.

For example, if you're marketing a restaurant, some good metrics to track for engagement might be email newsletter sign-ups and menu downloads.

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3. Start with a low-risk pilot program

Propose a low-risk, time-limited pilot program to experiment with a new initiative on social and track its performance. This will demonstrate how social can help your business achieve a particular objective, such as hitting a monthly target for occupancy rates. Armed with hard data about how social is contributing to business objectives, you'll be able to create a compelling business case for further investment.

4. Don't try to do everything

Social data insights can drive business value, but social can't do everything. Be clear about what it can—and cannot—do when measuring ROI. Demonstrate what's possible with the data you have, or data you can easily access, to prove the value of social in areas that impact the bottom line.

5. Analyse results to guide future strategies

Tracking the impact of social media on business objectives is a good start. Using past performance to improve future campaigns and actions is even better.

Surface usable insights from your social data by starting with a trend you've noticed—maybe that tweets about your venue with more than one photo result in more conversions. Gather more data to determine if your analysis is correct and devise tactics that are easy for other teams to replicate.

[Request a demo](#) and learn how Hootsuite can help your organisation deliver powerful customer experiences and drive real business results on social.

Endnotes

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Hootsuite is the most widely used platform for managing social media, loved by over 16 million people around the globe and trusted by more than 800 of the Fortune 1000. Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era and scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and regions. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of social networks complemented by 250+ business applications and integrations, allowing organizations to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

Along with our channel and agency partners, we help organizations build deeper relationships with customers, stay connected to the needs of the market, grow revenue, and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help organizations pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through product training, group training and tailored organizational training, as well as security and compliance services.

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