

Social Media Is The New Word of Mouth



By Mark Luckey, Travel Business Consultant

It's no surprise business veterans that according to a McKinsey Study, two-thirds of consumer decisions are affected by word of mouth. Another study (Yanklovich) also showed that less than 15% of people trusted advertisers. NOP World states that 90% of customers rate word of mouth as the most reliable source about information on products and services.

Word of mouth happens during conversations. Since the mid 90's, people communicate more and more online, on a number of synchronised devices (laptop, phone, PC), more regularly, to larger networks of people.

“Word of mouth” online equals “viral marketing”

The challenge is how to stimulate word of mouth, that's positive and about your business. The answer that challenge is a strategic online presence embracing social media.

73% of social media users are seeking others impressions on a brand, product or service. Therefore, these online conversations are driving business. Think about Trip Advisor.

Could you have imagined, 10 years ago, sitting in a foreign airport lounge, waving to your 3 year old on a Skype webcam whilst you chatted to a client on your mobile and scanned Facebook?

Social media is such a powerful medium for word of mouth as:

- Messages can go viral
- Consumers are empowered to broadcast their own thoughts along with key brands
- It's democratic
- Anyone can do it

You don't need to visit 200 hotels in Bangkok to work out which one is “best”. No longer do you just need to believe the wholesaler who tells you it's “the best”. Trip Advisor is a “simulated experience” delivery system that that provides information on travel services and rates them.

But for travel agents to capitalise on the new word of mouth, they need to focus on positive messages. Advocates are the key mouth piece for positive reinforcement of your brand. Social media therefore makes us more accountable and should improve the quality of what we do every day.

What's the take away message for travel agents? Be accountable, create advocates and get them advertising your brand for you.