

11 Marketing:

INCON

Social Media - “Joining the conversation”



Our ways of communication have changed. Today there are powerful communication tools at our disposal which make it possible to reach an audience greater than we can ever imagine. Thanks to social media the world is getting smaller and it is easier than ever to spread a message, share thoughts and make meaningful connections.

What is Social Media?

The meaning of the term 'social media' can be derived by examining each of the words which constitute it. Media generally refers to an instrument of communication. Social implies the interaction of individuals within a group or community. Social media is part of the Web 2.0 revolution, the use of web based channels and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue. We are all part of this dialogue so it is highly important to learn how, what and where to communicate. Your audience is out there and waiting for you...to join the conversation.

Why we need Social Media?

While social media is fast, interactive and accessible, it is also a cost effective way to communicate directly with a target audience. Social media tools help distribute content in ways that print media can never achieve. Social media platforms including Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter help organizations to distribute their message, promote their brand and create awareness of events.

The power of social media

Social media makes it easier to access information, people, brands, companies, events etc. Social media tools allow us to contribute the content and make it more relevant and meaningful. Who we are and what we say is more important than ever. The key differentiation from traditional marketing is that companies now need to be part of the conversation as opposed to simply broadcasting their message with no feedback or interaction.

HOW TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA

A successful social media strategy includes the following actions;

Define your objectives/goals - Why do you think you should be on social media? What do you want to say? What do you expect to achieve? Defining your goals is one of the fundamental steps in implementing a social media strategy.

Define your target audience - Who do you want to reach? Where are they? Understanding your target audience and how they use social media is key.

Use the right tools - Today people have many ways to discover, share and tell others what they think. Analyse your options and choose the most effective and appropriate way to communicate with your audience.

Value your content - Obsolete, outdated conversation has no place on your Facebook page or Twitter account. What you say is as important as when you say it. Conversation must be alive, current and up-to-date. You must be prepared to add value.

Measure your results - Whichever social media tools you adapt it is important to monitor their effectiveness against pre defined goals and adapt your activity accordingly. There's no 'one size fits all' solution to social media analytics but in order to manage it you've got to measure it.

Social Media and the meeting industry

Social media shares the same goal as conferences and events; gathering people around a certain topic. Social media has the potential to impact greatly on the lifecycle of an event. Associations are creating Facebook pages around conferences to promote awareness and generate community before the event starts. Social media tools enable information sharing and networking during the event. And once it has concluded, the conversation continues.

Social media and INCON research

A survey conducted by INCON at IMEX 2011 revealed that Facebook and LinkedIn are the platforms which most meeting and event companies are using to concentrate their social media efforts. Of the 930 meeting specialists surveyed at the INCON Cyber Cafe over the three days of the tradeshow, 46.5% identified Facebook as their first choice of social media while LinkedIn was deemed next most popular choice at 29.4%. Other important platforms included Twitter, blogs and Youtube.

Interestingly, these findings support the data gleaned from INCON's third annual survey of the global association conference market which was unveiled at IMEX 2011. This survey of the directors and executives of the 11 INCON partner companies also ranked Facebook and LinkedIn as the top choices of social media tools for conference promotion followed in order of importance by Twitter, blogs and Youtube.

In summary, social media is an increasingly important part of the conference marketing mix, changing the way that conferences are promoted and executed. Incorporating social media into conference planning can increase content relevance, drive participation and positive return on investment.

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Basak Gurbuz is Project Leader of Serenas Group, a leading PCO in Turkey providing all types of meeting and event organisation services on national and international platforms.

Headquartered in Ankara with branch offices in Istanbul, Izmir and Northern Cyprus, Serenas has extensive experience in organizing small to large, moderate to high profile meetings and events for clients including medical associations, corporate and governmental organisations.

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