



How to go Viral



A GUIDE ON SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING
FOR HOTELIERS & VACATION RENTALS

BY JANINE YU

Can you remember the last viral post you saw?

Was it a cat video/ dance meme/ hot take on a trending topic, or just something or someone that elicited an outsized reaction from you, whether it was laughter, disgust, or amazement? Chances are, you came across it on social media. And that post/ image/ video became viral because a lot of people felt it was worth sharing with the world. Imagine if you could harness that influence with a social media strategy in promoting your hospitality brand.

Amy Draheim, a hotel marketing guru, says, “More often than not, social media is where ‘wanderlust’ begins,” says Draheim, adding, “Now more than ever, social media is proving to be a booking channel as well. People are spending more time on social media platforms than ever, and at the same time, they’re getting more comfortable making big-ticket purchase items right from the palm of their hand.”

Victoria King, a veteran PR specialist for the luxury hospitality industry, agrees.

“Social media can help to create additional awareness and image appeal for a hospitality brand,” King says. “The platforms are so varied and with so many people reading and utilizing many channels to receive and collect information --social media allows for an overall increase in reach.”

Draheim notes that if your prospective guests are hanging out on social media, “let’s hope you not only have a presence on social platforms, but also a strategy to grow awareness, earn engagement, and convert those followers to hotel guests.”

In this guide to social media marketing, we’ll go over some tips on how to win at social media and go viral!





NUMBER 1

Leverage multiple social platforms

Different social media platforms have different purposes, and therefore different audiences. Reach your guests where they're at. Draheim says you need to determine the impact you're looking for. "When it comes to getting clicks to your website, where a prospective guest can browse rooms, photos, plan and book their vacation, it's actually Pinterest that leads the pack! If you're looking for clout and to stay relevant, Instagram is where you're likely spending more of your time. Then there's TikTok,

where surprisingly, 40% of users are moms (a.k.a. the people responsible for planning and booking a lot of family travel), and therefore this new and emerging channel should not be overlooked," she says.

Also look beyond image-heavy platforms. King says, "LinkedIn is an important tool as it reaches a business sector for group sales, and it also instills added credibility. Twitter can be helpful when you have 'real' news to share and/or are trying to engage with end users."

NUMBER 2

Stay active

Your credibility on social media plays an important role in your guest's purchase decision. Two in five millennials say that hotel and travel images influence their booking. Besides leveraging multiple channels, consider the ones with the most reach. As the most popular social media platform, Facebook provides you with the most opportunities to advertise.

Whichever apps you choose to be active on, consistency is key. Post regularly and develop a strong presence. Interact with your audience by liking their posts, send comments, respond to DMs, and share your brand experience. It can help you to retain your existing audience, broaden your reach and attract new followers. However often you choose to post, be consistent with the frequency. Besides staying top of mind with your audience, it sends a signal that your posts are well-considered, and not just random one-offs.

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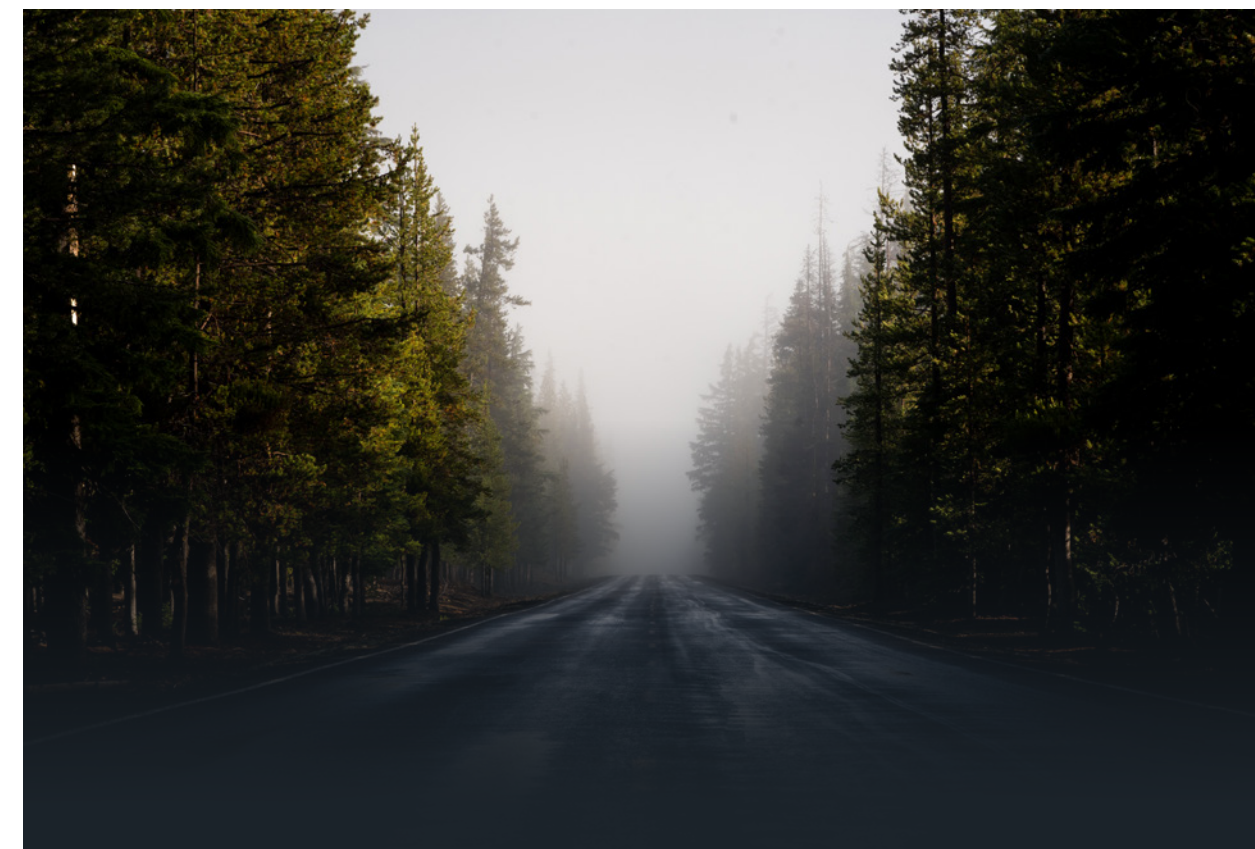


NUMBER 3

Talk about the local area

Guests expect hotels to be plugged into the local community. The best way to showcase this is to get staff recommendations on where to eat and drink, what to do, and must-sees in the area. Getting these suggestions straight from a local – whether through quotes or short videos—is more valuable to the traveler than anything written on a brochure, since they can’t verify the source.

Plus, hotels don’t exist in a silo. Unless you’re a destination resort, chances are, travelers are visiting not just your property, but also the town or city you’re in. Show you know what’s going on by featuring local events and attractions.



NUMBER 4

Contests

Create contests and sweepstakes that engage guests in a meaningful way. Sweepstakes require minimal effort from the audience – sometimes just liking a post and sharing it with a few people—and a random selection can win the participant a prize, such as a free stay at your resort. Contests require more effort, with winners selected by judges (and not just drawn by chance). An example would be a resort asking its followers to name a resident turtle. Entries would be nominated and voted on for the prize of a two-night stay and a meet-and-greet with the turtle.

Contests are widely popular in the travel space. Build buzz and anticipation with frequent updates, reminders of what’s at stake, highlight the best entries and do a countdown until a winner is chosen. The best contents go beyond promoting a property. The Four Seasons Seattle held a contest on Instagram to find an original view of the sunset in the city. It encouraged locals and tourists alike to explore the city and enjoy different views of sunsets, while also offering prizes, as well as raising awareness for the Pediatric Brain Tumor Research Fund.



NUMBER 5

Leverage influencers

Influencers come with the territory, and you need to learn not just whom to work with, but the most effective ways of working with them. “The influencers who are most effective in driving revenue are the ones that align well with your brand and your customer demographics and/or the new markets you’re hoping to reach,” says Draheim. “If you’re a resort in Bend, Oregon for instance, partnering with a tween beauty blogger with a million followers in Mexico might get you a whole heap of followers over the course of a paid giveaway campaign, but chances are, it won’t drive one cent of revenue because nearly all of your business is coming from the Pacific Northwest.”

“On the other hand,” adds Draheim, “if you partner with a mommy blogger in Portland’s affluent suburbs, chances are you will earn not just qualified followers but also bookings from the influencer’s audience.”

Victoria King’s PR agency works with the philosophy that “less is more” – they look for “affluencers” and “tastemakers” who can actually move the needle with regard to engagement and client bookings. And when it works, the results can be huge. King recounts a very high-profile celebrity family who booked her private villa client. The family posted about it on social channels, the villa received many bookings stemming from that viral post, and it led to the eventual sale of the villa. “It was a win-win for both the celebrity family, as well as for the owner,” says King.



Don’t Forget to Tag!

Posting without hashtags on Instagram is equivalent to not posting at all! According to [Hubspot](#), a leading marketing CRM, images with hashtags see 12.6% more engagement.

NUMBER 6


Utilize guest-generated content

“User generated content can inspire others to follow a brand as well as introduce a new client to a brand,” says King, adding, “Thus, when you have an interesting user-generated post, engagement is key to show appreciation and support.”

Draheim believes brands can inspire user-generated content by providing experiences that are worthy of sharing, whether it’s a quirky guest room amenity, cocktails served in unique glasses, or a setting that highlights a stunning sunset. “Don’t get too hung up on creating ‘Instagrammable’ moments,” advises Draheim, “which tend to fall flat in real life, and instead,

hone in on the guest experience to make it truly memorable.”

You can also incentivize guests to share their experiences by including branded hashtags around the amenities and experiences you think are noteworthy, or offering something in return for tagged content that you intend to share in your feed (like a complimentary dessert, or a monthly drawing for a free night’s stay if the guest’s photo is shared). Leading the way is [Flip.to](#), a NAVIS partner, which provides a social platform for guests to share and promote their hotel experience with their personal networks.



NUMBER 7

Video or it didn't happen!

If a picture paints a thousand words, imagine what video can convey. Guests increasingly turn to video to get a better sense of a property, whether it's through a virtual room tour or a property highlight reel showcasing the facilities.

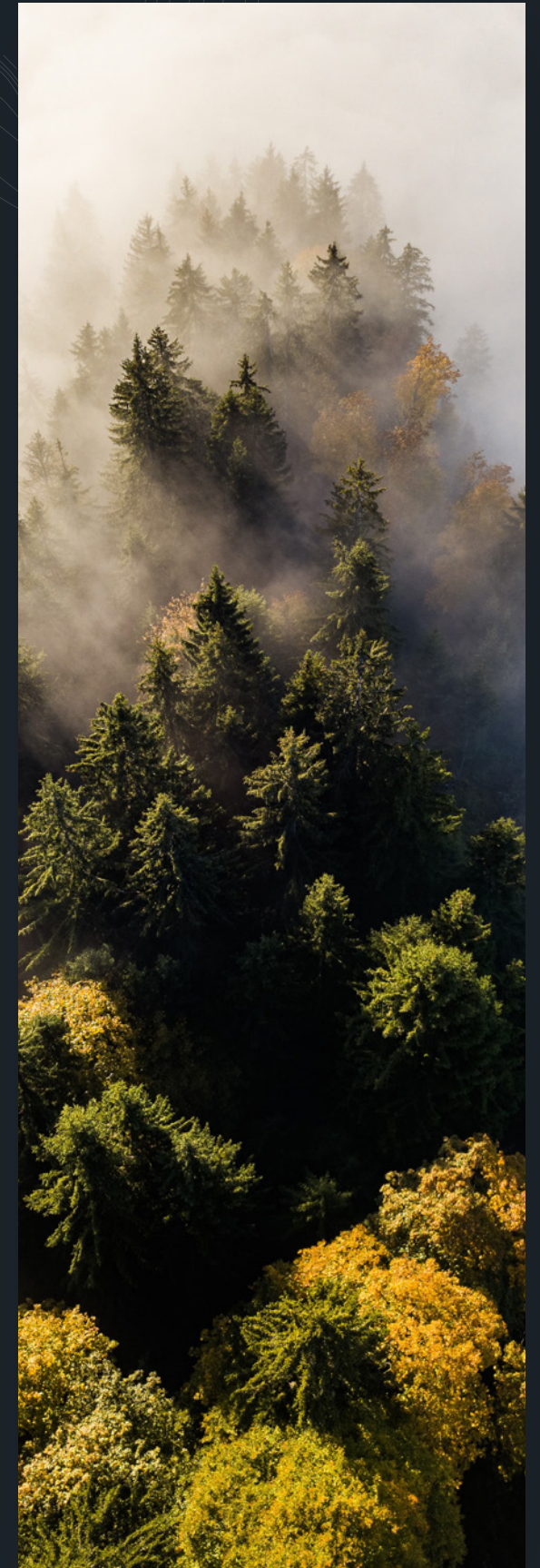
These days, there are lots of fun ways to play with video. You can use Instagram Reels, Facebook Stories, Boomerang, TikTok, and Snapchat. You can livestream on Facebook an event from your property. You can post video testimonials of your guests on Youtube. Consider engaging professionals for the more important videos, such as a property tour, as guests expect high production value from luxury properties.

NUMBER 8

Cross-promote

Share your content on multiple streams for maximum exposure but be sure to have consistent messaging optimized for the channel. Adapt your posting to the main users of the platform.

Draheim suggests the following: "Establish a monthly strategy document with an overall theme and a content calendar. Then, push out content across all marketing channels, tweaking the content for the channel. For instance, if you're promoting seasonal activities and a stay package, your website needs to reflect that imagery on your home page, the offer on your specials page, and perhaps you've even created a landing page with a guide to that season/offering. On social, maybe you'll push out the various activities, a few per week, on channels like Facebook and Instagram. Maybe you'll create a seasonal guide as a board on Pinterest or on IG Guides, maybe you'll create a short video of what the experience might be like, and push that out on Instagram Reels or TikTok. Maybe you'll partner with an influencer to experience that offering in real time, and create their own content to push out to their audience via their blog and social channels."





NUMBER 9

Keep the review game strong

“Social media is a place where guest reviews are happening, whether you like it or not,” says Draheim. “So really, it’s a non-negotiable for hotels to have a presence and be active across social channels. The alternative is getting left behind in more ways than one...,” she adds.

Monitor, respond, and highlight positive reviews across all channels. At the very least, it’s a way

to stay engaged with an audience that already has a relationship with your property. Even if it’s a bad review, it’s worth acknowledging and responding to it, as that can go a long way for a prospective guest who finds it valuable to know how hotel management responds to issues. Responding to reviews, good or bad, is a way for your brand to control the narrative and strengthen your brand identity.

NUMBER 10

Be authentic

Stay true to your brand identity and don’t try to sell your brand as something it’s not. Remember that going viral can also be a negative thing – you don’t want to be known as the hotel with misleading property photos or false advertising. The most authentic approach is to share stories about your guests’ experiences and to highlight your staff. Give a human face to the brand and remember that hospitality is about the human connection.

REMEMBER:

Followers and likes don't always equal revenue

While it's great to be popular on social media, don't measure your success by the amount of followers or likes you have. "Followers can be bought," says Draheim, "and a large following doesn't necessarily reflect a healthy account."

When planning your social media strategy, keep an eye on how your efforts affect your bottom line. "Social media can drive engagement, it can drive followers, and it can drive bookings," Draheim reminds us. Keep your end goal in sight and use that as a yardstick for how well you're winning at social media.

Contributors

AMY DRAHEIM

Owner, ABD Creative

Amy Draheim brings people to hotels, and hotels to people. After publishing her novel in 2008, which won a New York Public Library Award, Amy traded fiction writing for steaks, suites, and spas. In 2017, she founded ABD Creative, a hotel marketing agency. She's gained a robust portfolio of hospitality clients since then, from Maui to Manhattan. In the throes of the pandemic, Amy doubled down—she launched How To Share, a podcast highlighting non-traditional hoteliers, and Sauced Marketing, a turnkey marketing solution for restaurants.



VICTORIA KING

President & CEO, Victoria King Public Relations, Inc.



Victoria founded the agency in 1992 and has more than 35 years of experience in the luxury hospitality and tourism industry. Prior to founding VKPR, she served as the director of public relations for the Bel-Air Hotel Company and The Biltmore, Los Angeles. In addition, she worked for the Los Angeles office of Hill & Knowlton and Ketchum Public Relations in New York City. As president, Victoria continues to represent a select list of unique luxury resorts, hotels and destinations around the world. She earned a bachelor's degree in Art History and English Literature

from Hollins College, Virginia, and the University of London, England. Victoria is a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and resides in Santa Monica, California. Whether at home or traveling to the far corners of the world, Victoria always finds time for her true passion for sports, health and wellness. A dedicated Francophile, Victoria considers Paris her second home.



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