

The Role of
Social Media
in Your Travel Marketing Strategy



Unlock the Power

of Social Media in the Travel Industry

Social media has changed the way every business operates, but it is especially important for businesses that are customer facing and rely on reputation to succeed—something that describes most companies in the travel industry. A recent study found that around 20% of travelers use social media to help them plan and organize their trips. If you haven't yet established a social media presence as a travel industry business, now is an excellent time to get into the game.

Not all platforms are created equal. Each works differently and draws a different audience. To maximize the potential ROI for your business, you need to know your target audience and your goals. You also need to understand who's using which platform and how. To help you get started, we'll give you insight in this eBook on how to set up your presence and maximize your efforts, with tips specific to the travel niche.



¹Pew Research Center "Social Media Fact Sheet," January 12, 2017

²Pew Research Center "Social Media Usage: 2005–2015," October 8, 2015

³Media Life Magazine "Shocker: Millennials aren't heaviest social media users," January, 19 2017

But first, contents

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Setting Targets and Goals

Before you can start using social media platforms to your benefit, you need to plan out how you'll go about it in a way that will create a strong profile for your brand. This means figuring out which social media platforms will work best for your industry, determining what kind of content you'll be posting (and how often you'll post it), and set your goals and metrics for success.

Building an effective and affordable social media marketing strategy means you should be able to answer three key questions:

- 1 Who do you want to reach?**
(Decide whether you're targeting current customers or trying to reach a new demographic.)
- 2 What do you want to accomplish?**
(Is it your aim to increase sales and customer visits? Are you trying to promote a new product or service that you offer? In some cases, the goal may be more general, like increasing your credibility or brand visibility.)
- 3 How do you plan to measure results?**
(There are a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that can be useful in the travel industry. How you measure results will follow logically from your goals. If you're trying to build credibility, you could measure success in retweets and page views. If your goal is to increase sales, you may be more interested in click-throughs and conversions.)



Understanding the Platforms

It is impossible to keep up with all of the social media sites that exist in the world. You'll get more effective results by identifying the ones that will be most beneficial in reaching your target audience and building a profile on just those platforms. Develop only as many platforms as you can maintain consistently, and with a high quality level. You can always add more in the future if you find you have the time and resources.

While there are some social media platforms that tend to work equally well for a wide range of businesses, there are others that will be of more specific interest depending on your brand and target audience. Some of the most popular platforms and their best uses are explored in the sections that follow.



Understanding the Platforms:

Facebook



If you only have time to maintain one social media platform, Facebook is the best one to choose. It is visually-driven, which makes it perfect for businesses in the travel industry. The vast world-wide network has over 1.2 billion daily users and it's the most widely utilized platform across demographics.

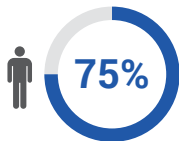


1.23B
active daily users

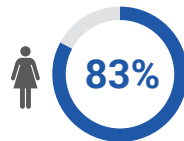


1.15B
mobile daily users

Use by gender⁵:

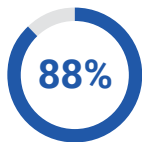


Online men use Facebook

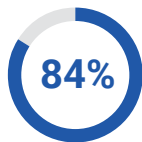


Online women use Facebook

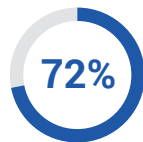
Use by age⁶:



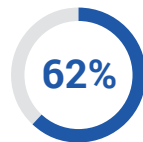
Online adults ages 18-29



Online adults ages 30-49



Online adults ages 50-64



Online adults ages 65+

Best practices

- Invite user interaction wherever possible. Ask a question, run a contest, or invite users to caption a photo from your business.
- Use Facebook's targeting and gating features to make sure your posts reach the audiences that will be most interested in them.
- Consider paying to boost well-performing posts so you can reach new users.
- Encourage sharing by asking people to tag themselves in your pictures. You can also share content other users post that shows them enjoying your business.
- Stay on top of current trends and post links to older content to put it back at the top of user newsfeeds.

Best times for posting

- Activity levels are steady throughout the workday.
- Post 5 to 10 times per week between 1 and 3 p.m. for the most shares and likes.

5-10x
per week

⁴ Facebook Newsroom

⁵ Pew Research Center, "Social Media Update 2016," November 2016.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ [MediaKix, The Facebook Video Statistics Everyone Needs to Know, August 2016](#)

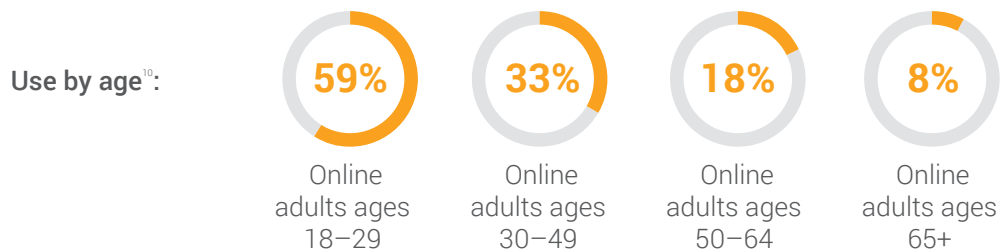
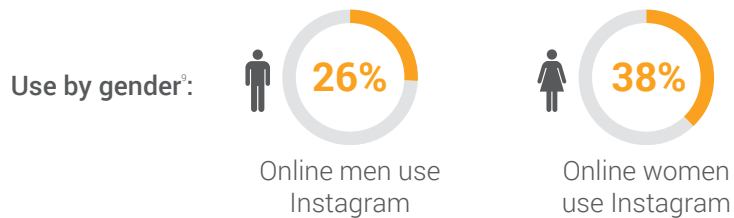
Understanding the Platforms:

Instagram



While it doesn't have as broad of a user base as Facebook, Instagram's focus on photos and videos makes it ideal for businesses in the travel industry. Use strong visuals to tell a story and get people interested in your niche or region.

Where Facebook is an all-purpose platform, Instagram is a vital tool for some niches, especially those that appeal to a younger audience.



Best practices

- Quality content is the key on Instagram. Use unique images, not stock photos, and pay attention to the composition and lighting.
- Learn how to use hashtags to reach bigger audiences. You can use up to 30 per post, but 9-10 is usually a good number.
- Experiment with image formats and the site's variety of filters to enhance your images.
- Pay attention to what content and filters perform best in your niche.
- Excellent tool for building authority and brand visibility.

Best times for posting

- Peak usage times are the end of the workday and late at night.
- Post once a day, every day.¹¹

1x per day, every day

⁸ Instagram, Press News,

⁹ Pew Research Center, "Social Media Update 2016," November 2016.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Social Media Week, "How to Optimize Your Social Media Posting Frequency," 2016.

Understanding the Platforms:

Twitter



The main aim of Twitter is to share news and quick comments or insights. Posts are traditionally limited to 140 characters (though this has been slowly changing).

Twitter is excellent in a supplementary capacity for a travel industry business because you can use it to expand the reach of your other posts. Demographically, it's most popular among younger users, and less effective at reaching older customers.



313M

active monthly users¹²



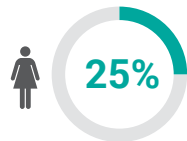
82%

are active on mobile devices¹²

Use by gender¹³:



Online men use Twitter

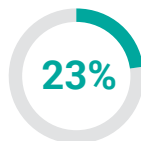


Online women use Twitter

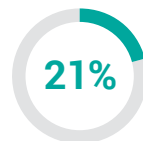
Use by age¹³:



Online adults ages 18-29



Online adults ages 30-49



Online adults ages 50-64



Online adults ages 65+

Best practices

- Can use it to post links to other content on sites like Instagram, YouTube, or your blog, to expand the number of potential eyes that see it.
- Use Twitter Cards to stand out. Cards let you include images, video, and audio and download links along with your message.
- Stay on top of trending memes, keywords, and hashtags in your niche.
- Use URL shorteners to save space.
- Don't try too hard to sell yourself. Restrict promotional content to less than 20% of your overall posts, and instead focus on starting conversations with users.

Best times for posting

- Tweets have a relatively short life cycle, so post 3 to 5 times per day, every day.
- For B2B interactions, user engagement is highest on weekdays. B2C levels are highest on weekends.¹⁴

3-5x

per day, every day

¹²Twitter

¹³Pew Research Center, "Social Media Update 2016," November 2016.

¹⁴[Social Media Week, "How to Optimize Your Social Media Posting Frequency" 2016.](#)

Understanding the Platforms:

YouTube



The most popular video-sharing platform on the internet, YouTube is the best platform for catching and holding user attention for significant stretches of time. The long average viewing session gives you more time to make an impact than the quick glance a picture might get on Instagram.

A YouTube channel can function nicely as the main landing platform for your social media efforts as a travel company. Use your videos to tell a story and entice viewers to see your destination in person.



1B+
users



REACHES MORE

18–49-year-olds on mobile devices than any cable network¹⁷



40 MIN

Average viewing session on mobile¹⁸

Best practices

- Use catchy titles that include keywords and compelling thumbnail images.
- Include links to your website.
- Encourage user engagement by asking for likes and comments or including calls to action.
- Focus on posting high-quality content that will hold user attention long enough to convey your message.

Best times for posting

- Making quality videos takes time, so you can post less often than on other social networks. Do post consistently—for example, one video per week.
- Best times to post are from 2 to 4 p.m., Monday through Wednesday; from 12 to 3 p.m. Thursday and Friday; and from 9 to 11 a.m. on the weekend.¹⁹
- Use other social networks to promote the videos you post on YouTube.

1x per week

¹⁷<https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>;

¹⁸<http://www.businessinsider.com/google-q2-earnings-call-youtube-vs-tv-2015-7>

¹⁹<http://www.tubefilter.com/2015/01/12/best-days-times-to-post-youtube-videos-yearly-calendar/>

Understanding the Platforms:

Other Platforms

While the sites listed above are the most widely used options, at least in the United States, they're certainly not the only social media channels out there. Other popular platforms like Pinterest, Google+, and Snapchat can be useful in targeting specific demographics. Individual niches may have their own sites and channels that they frequent; research within your niche is key.

Some sites that are practically unknown in the United States are very popular internationally. The Chinese microblogging site Weibo is used by over 30% of internet users. If your destination gets a lot of international tourism, you may want to give the site a try.

Stay current with review sites like Trip Advisor, Four Square, and Yelp. Make sure the information on your profile is accurate and check the comments and reviews about your business—both the positive and the negative.

A final word on platforms

You should determine where each social media platform plays into your overall marketing strategy and create a landing page on each site that reinforces your brand. Your profile should clearly communicate who you are and what you're about, and should tell your customers what they stand to gain by following you. It should include contact information and have a link to your website and other social media platforms.

While building your social media presence in-house isn't much of a chore, maintaining it over the long term can be. Consider who will manage your social media pages, and whether it might be worth it to pay someone to take care of them for you, so that you can focus on your business. The same might go for other aspects of your online brand. You could hire a designer to create your logo, or hire a professional videographer or photographer to get shots of your work in action.

Last tips

- You can incentivize followers on other social media platforms to leave reviews on sites like TripAdvisor, increasing your visibility and rating.
- Use engaging images and videos.
- Each platform has its own methods for targeting specific groups. Consider your target demographic and use that to guide your searches of keywords and trends.
- Share industry-relevant news items and posts to help establish yourself as an authority in your niche.

Establishing a Presence and Creating Content

Content is a generic term for everything you use to promote yourself to customers online. This can include text posted on a blog or website, videos and photos, or other media, like podcasts and eBooks. The use of these materials to bring customers to your business is known as content marketing, and can take many forms depending on the niche and industry you work in.

The general rule of thumb is that your content should be unique and should provide your customers with a real value. You want to wow your visitors with stunning images that make them want to visit you, and provide them with helpful information that will make them trust you as an authority. Travel news updates, how-to videos related to your niche, and photo or video showcases of other people enjoying your destination can all be helpful tools in your overall content marketing strategy.

Good content:

- Uses words and images that trigger positive reactions.
- Is interactive as possible. Find unique ways to get your users involved.
- Drives traffic to your business. You can use promotional offers or coupons aimed at followers on a given social media platform to convert Likes into customers.



Use Video

Even more so than other industries, exciting visuals are key in the travel industry. You can use pictures to tell a story and highlight the kind of experience your viewers can expect when they come to see you in person.

Videos are an especially valuable marketing tool. Viewers are ten times as likely to share, like, or otherwise engage with video content than they are with just text or images. The key is to make sure the video is a high enough quality to keep viewers engaged long enough to hear your message. If you can make the video shareable, even better. Followers sharing your posts is one of the best kinds of free advertising you can get on social media.



²⁰ Vidyard, "5 Reasons Video Must be a Part of Your 2016 Marketing Budget," 2016. <https://www.vidyard.com/blog/5-reasons-video-must-2016-marketing-budget/>

Use SEO and SEM



The idea behind SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is to use certain keywords to maximize your placement in search results. A strategy for using SEO is known as a SEM Strategy (or Search Engine Marketing).

Always keep balance in mind when you're using SEO. Don't use the keywords if they sound stiff or forced. Using too many keywords can actually hurt you; this is known as "keyword stuffing," and can trigger the search engine's bots to consider your site less reputable.

Using the right keywords in moderation can help direct interested consumers to your site. Brainstorm a list of keywords associated with your niche and industry, then check them in Google analytics or a similar software to see which ones rank highest in the search results. Using the right keywords can help bring your page up as a relevant option for information, which can in turn get more people interested in your brand.

Building an Audience

While the ultimate goal of every social media marketing campaign may differ, the first step is generally the same: get eyes on your brand and business so that you can reach the number of likes, conversions, or other metric that you're using to determine success. Doing this can be a challenge, especially when you're starting from scratch. There is a lot of noise in the social media world. Convincing readers that they should pay attention to you is the first challenge.

The main way to build your audience is to place the focus on engagement rather than promotion. Nobody likes feeling like they're being sold to. If you instead focus on capturing your viewer's interest, the sales will often come naturally. Remember that engagement goes both ways. If you like, share, or comment on relevant content posted by other users, they'll be more likely to check out your posts and give you a like back in return.



Respond to Comments

One of the most important things you should make sure to do across your social media platforms is to always respond to comments left on your pages—both the positive and the negative. How you respond to negative feedback can do a lot to shape user views about your brand. If you respond well to negative feedback, you have a chance to put a positive spin on a negative situation.

- If you consistently get the same negative feedback, consider that an opportunity to refine your brand and make changes accordingly. Being able to capture that kind of customer input is one of the most valuable things about social media.
- Apologizing for and fixing an issue actually increases user trust because it shows that you care about your customer's experience.



Incentivize Users

You can get more people to talk about and share your content by giving them an added incentive to do so. It's often the most effective to offer a tangible prize related to your business, like a discount or added perk on their next visit. On platforms like Instagram and Twitter, you can run a hashtag contest, instructing users to upload photos or images of themselves interacting with your brand with a certain designated hashtag attached. You can review all the entries and award the prize to the winner, sharing the top few on your page to showcase them. Not only does this get individual users more engaged with your brand, the extra hashtags will give you more weight in the search rankings.



Become an Authority

One of the challenges of many travel industry businesses is that even loyal customers may only frequent your business a handful of times per year, or only during certain times of the year. Putting yourself forward as a reliable source of news related to your niche can keep you in the front of their minds even between visits. It also makes them more likely to recommend you to friends who are thinking about taking a trip. Word of mouth is another free form of advertising that you can do very well taking advantage of. It also keeps people coming back to your site, so when they are ready to travel you're at the front of their minds.

Utilize Experts

Every niche has its industry leaders, people with a lot of clout and active followers. Getting a positive review or mention from one of these voices can put your business in front of a lot of interested eyes in a big way.

Search the social media platforms you utilize for the people in your niche who have the largest and most loyal followings. Don't only pay attention to their sheer number of followers, but also how active they are with regards to leaving comments and clicking links. This is a better indicator of how much attention you might get from their followers.

Of course, you will rarely encounter an industry mover who will write this kind of review for free. Depending on the size of their following, they may be willing to write a positive review in exchange for a free visit to your establishment. The more followers they have, though, they more likely they will ask for a monetary payment in exchange for their review. If you're going to pay money for a review, make sure that the followers you'll be reaching fit within your target demographic.



Analyze your Past performance



Many social media platforms have built-in analytics that let you track what kind of content generates the most engagement. There are also a variety of third party sites that can give you more insight into how your viewers respond to your content. Use these tools wisely. Consider all factors, including the type of content, the length of text and videos, the tone of your posts, and the time you're posting.

Popularity is one factor that search engines look for when they rank results. In other words, the more people engage with your pages, the more likely new visitors will see them. Taking a flexible approach to your social media strategy is key. Constantly look for ways you can better get your message across to your target audience.

Travel industry Challenges

(And how to overcome them)

There are factors inherent to social media marketing that can make it a challenge for any business to stay relevant and catch the attention of the right consumers. The most obvious is the fast-changing nature of social media. Keeping up with the current trends and changing rules and features across social media platforms can be a full-time job. Learning how to target your focus onto the things most relevant to your niche can help you wade through all the social media noise.

Mobile devices accounted for 55% of US internet use in 2016. Users who are traveling are even more likely to be on their phones than other users, since it's such a convenient way to look for information while you're on the go. Making sure that your online presence is mobile-friendly is another key to making sure you're catching the right eyes.



Competition

In many ways, the world is smaller than it's ever been before. You can watch a livestream of a sports match or concert from almost anywhere in the world. This is a double-edged sword for a travel-based business. On the one hand, it means anyone in the world can find your business; on the other, it means you have a much larger competitor pool to contend with.

More destinations are now competing for the attention of travelers. It's increasingly harder to stand out in the online travel industry landscape. There are two primary things that will help you navigate this increased competition. The first is to focus in on your target niche. Figure out as much as you can about your target consumer, and design all of your online efforts to appeal to those users. The second is to provide compelling content that holds user attention. Someone who's looking for travel ideas might glance through a dozen possible destinations. It's your goal to have them linger on yours.



Changing expectations

Social media allows customers to interact with businesses on a personal level. Most internet users today are not swayed by techniques like click-bait headers and flashing banners. In fact, using these can hurt your credibility more than they bring in business.

Social media platforms allow users to tailor the content they see to match their interests. Write your posts in the same way. Adapt to both the platform and your customer interests. On Twitter, invite users into a conversation; on Instagram, use photographs to tell them a story. Whatever the platform, compelling words and images are the heart of any successful social media campaign.

The rising prominence of video can also present a challenge. Producing quality video can be time consuming. Inviting users to post their own videos (or sharing videos posted on their feeds) can also be an excellent way to add more video content to your feed without needing to shoot all of it yourself.

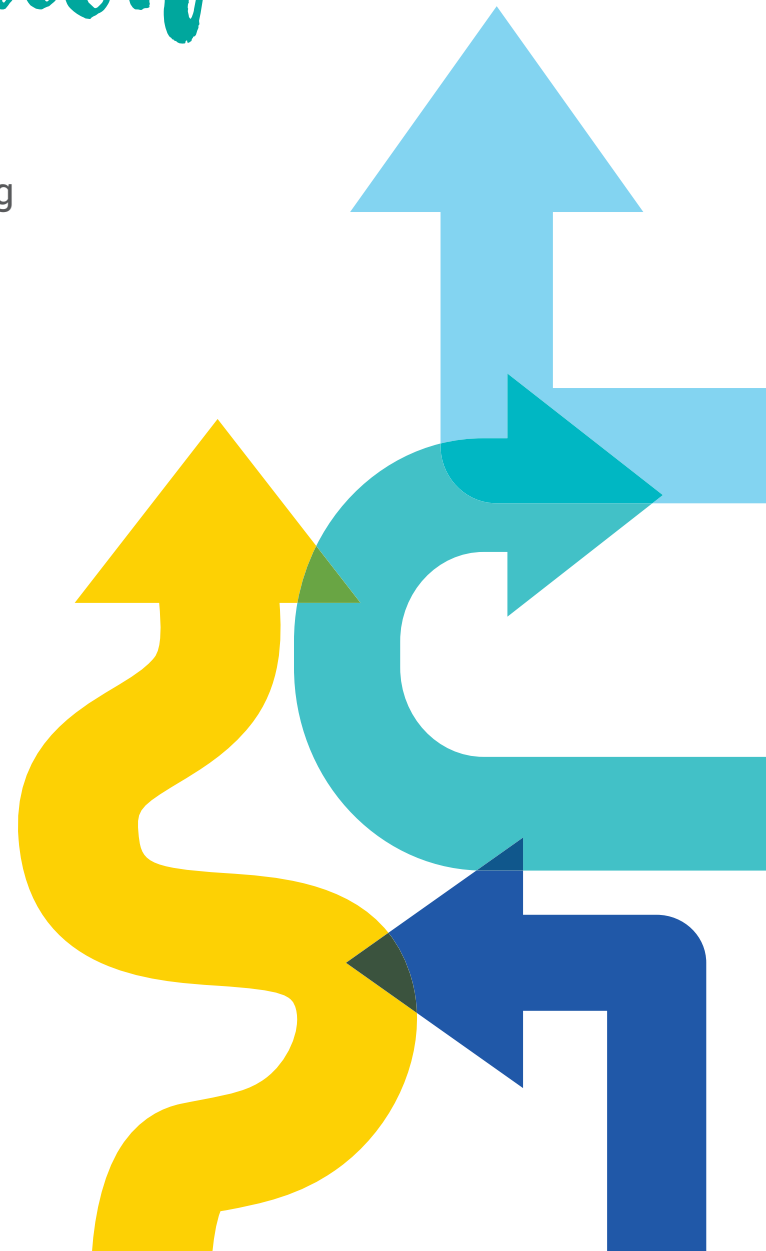


Retention vs. Acquisition

This is a debate that every business has with itself at some point: whether they should focus more on bringing in new customers or building the loyalty of the existing base. Traditional logic says that you will gain more as a business by cultivating loyalty than with a model focused on a shifting, volatile customer base, but this logic might not hold for a business in a tourist district, where a volatile customer base is a part of the environment.

Keep in mind that building customer loyalty can have rewards beyond simply their repeat patronage. Someone who's dedicated to your brand will be more likely to view and engage with your posts, or to recommend you to other users. Even for businesses in a volatile market, encouraging visitors to like you on Facebook or follow you on Instagram can help you keep in touch with your customers.

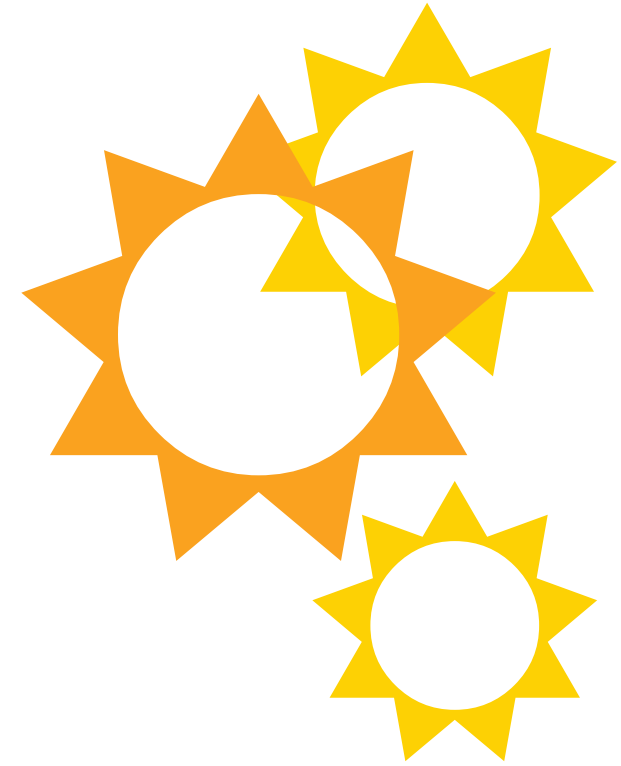
Whether you're focusing on acquiring new customers or building a loyal base will determine the best strategies to use in your marketing plan. Increasing your ranking in organic searches on platforms like Bing and Google would be more helpful in finding new customers, while a targeted email marketing campaign would be one example of a retention strategy.



Seasonal business

The social media presence for your company needs to be a year-round effort, even if your business isn't. Market trends can vary wildly at different times of the year. Keep up on the changing popularity of different keywords in your niche to know when the best times are to post certain content. Pay attention to the online habits of your target customers. If you're targeting college students, for example, you'll want to make sure to post a lot of content during college breaks, when they're more likely to have time to spend browsing the internet.

If you remain open all year but experience seasonal fluctuations, your off-season could be a good time to offer promotional deals to your social media followers. If you're closed part of the year, this is time to generate enthusiasm for the upcoming season. In either case, you may find it helpful to come up with a general plan for your content a season or two in advance to anticipate those times natural content might not come so easily.



Thanks

for downloading our eBook!

Remember, if you need help planning or implementing a social media marketing strategy, we're a full-service agency ready to do the hard work for you.

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