

Social media redefines how people plan travel



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Travelers want to see people in photos to entice them to visit a destination. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Social media continues to challenge marketers when it comes to promoting a destination because people are using multiple platforms and how they use them differs. In other words, the exact same message used every place probably isn't going to work.

Geotags are the latest way people are searching social media. It's about tagging a location, not just using a hashtag. Most smart phones can geotag automatically via the GPS device that is built in.

Even with all the technology that is available today, word of mouth is the No. 1 way people get introduced to a destination. According to research done by marketing firm Chute, 57 percent of people rely on word on mouth, with social media being No. 2 at 44 percent.

Geotagging can help combine the two by people looking up on social media what they've heard about from a friend.

Jody Farrar with Chute led a session about travelers' social media preferences and habits during this month's Mountain Travel Symposium at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

Platforms people are using in order of preference:

2016	2017	2018
Facebook	Facebook	Instagram
Instagram	YouTube	Facebook
YouTube	Instagram	YouTube
Pinterest	Pinterest	Pinterest
Twitter	Twitter	SnapChat
SnapChat	SnapChat	Twitter

Source: *Chute*

Facebook, Instagram and YouTube combined account for 50 percent of travel searches.

Farrar said Instagram's rise to the top could be because "it's easier to find inspiration." She added, "Following a hashtag is easier than following a brand."

Instagram has changed some things on its platform in the last 18 months which allows people to create collections. It's a way to save photos they like.

What Chute researchers are finding is that 75 percent of travelers are not following a destination. The No. 1 reason, Farrar said, is because people don't know they exist. Forty-one percent believe the information is too promotional.

For Tahoe this would mean they aren't following Tahoe South, Go North, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority or North Lake Tahoe Resort Association.

However, for those who are following a brand, the reasons are because they are researching a trip (38 percent), have already been there (37 percent), they like the content (25 percent.)

What could make SnapChat appealing for destinations is the ability to reach people once they are in the market. This is because of how people use the platform, but more important is that 80 percent of travelers don't make plans until they get to their destination, according to Farrar.

It's not just pretty pictures people want to see. They want to see others in the photos so they would have an easier time imagining themselves being transported to that spot. Travelers also tend to prefer authentic photos – ones shot by people actually experiencing the destination, and not professionally shot stills or videos.

Farrar said it's important to tell people to use key hashtags, to share collections and to tag other accounts so travelers are spreading the message in a different word of mouth format.