

A silhouette of a cyclist riding a mountain bike is shown against a bright sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The cyclist is in the foreground, leaning forward in a riding posture. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds, and a thin white contrail is visible in the upper right. The overall mood is adventurous and serene.

# the Savvy Operator

A Social Media Strategy for  
**Tour & Activity Operators**

sponsored by

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## Table of Contents

<b>Copyright Notice.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Objectives.....	4
Keys to Success.....	5
Strategic Overview.....	6
<b>Chapter One - Listening for your Customers.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Objectives of Listening.....	8
Listening Tools.....	9
Success Factors.....	11
<b>Chapter Two - Engaging with your Customers.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Objectives of Engaging.....	14
Tools of Engagement.....	17
Success Factors.....	18
<b>Chapter Three - Articulating your Offer.....</b>	<b>20</b>
Objectives of Articulating.....	22
Tools of Articulation.....	22
Success Factors.....	24
<b>Chapter Four - Demonstrating your Expertise.....</b>	<b>26</b>
Objectives of Demonstrating.....	26
Tools of Demonstration.....	30
Success Factors.....	32
<b>Chapter Five - Your Social Media Calendar.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Chapter Six - Simplifying the Strategy.....</b>	<b>36</b>
Measuring Success.....	36
Listen.....	37
Engage.....	37
Articulate.....	38
Demonstrate.....	38
<b>Chapter Seven - Reviewing the Plan.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Knowing when to change.....	41
<b>Chapter Eight - Building Social Habits.....</b>	<b>43</b>

## Introduction

As a tour or activity operator, your expertise more probably lies in providing travelers and guests with incredible experiences rather than in online marketing or managing social media campaigns. This guide identifies four key phases of social media strategy based on the acronym **L.E.A.D.**™, which stands for Listen, Engage, Articulate, and Demonstrate. Each phase of the strategy has its own set of objectives and its own measures of success. The benefit of this phased approach is that you have the choice of participating at different levels and seeing success without having to complete all phases.

In addition to outlining the four phase social media approach, we will build a social media calendar with action items that will help you tackle the daily, weekly, and monthly tasks that will form part of your social media habits.

## *Objectives*

The objectives of this strategy are:

1. Increasing social media mentions of your tour or activity business.
2. Increasing customer engagement with your company's brand.
3. Identify where your potential customers are congregating on-line.

4. Identify and engage with potential customers in their preferred environment.
5. Increasing referrals to your tour or activity website through social media.

## ***Keys to Success***

Success with any social media strategy depends on the following:

- **Participation** - This doesn't mean you have to become obsessed with social media, it just means understanding what your role is in any given conversation or social situation and maximizing your opportunity to contribute or be part of the conversation.
- **Consistency** - The way you and your company interacts on the social web must be consistent with your current business practices. For example, if a customer interacts with you on Twitter, they they should come to expect the same level of service as if they had called you or talked to you in person.
- **Timeliness** - You need to be aware of and react to customer demands in a timely fashion. This includes responding to reviews or comments on third party websites, Twitter, or on your Facebook fan page. Timeliness also implies that you are listening for mentions of your brand on-line.
- **Responsiveness** - There is nothing worse for a customer then to send a message or purposeful comment on Twitter or Facebook

that mentions your brand and not get a response. Remember that most customers send messages or post comments because they feel the need to vent or share an experience, either good or bad. By being responsiveness you stand a very good chance of turning a bad situation into a good one or encouraging further good comments.

## ***Strategic Overview***

The best way to approach social media is to imagine yourself entering a room filled with people. What would you do first? Most likely, you would wander around a bit and listen to the conversations happening around you. You would listen for things that have meaning for you or that may be topics you have some experience with. In this case, you might listen for conversations about your destination, your areas of interest, or any myriad other topics. You might also look for people that you know. If you find someone or hear a conversation that you know about, you might wait for an opportunity to insert yourself into the conversation by asking a question, for example “I couldn't help but overhear you talking about “X”. Have you ever done “Y” before?” Once the conversation gets going, it will proceed as conversations often do in any number of directions. At some point however, if you have been asking questions and interacting, the opportunity for you to introduce yourself and your business might come up. Almost everyone has had an experience like

this in the “real world”. The thing that most people don't realize is that social networks work the same way.

The **L.E.A.D.**™ strategy will guide you through this simple and straightforward process of listening, engaging in conversations, articulating what you know, and demonstrating your expertise or experience in a way that builds your reputation, credibility, and trust with your customers.

## Chapter One - Listening for your Customers

The Listening phase is the first and, I would argue, the most important step in the L.E.A.D.™ social media strategy. Like any conversation, listening affords the listener the luxury of understanding the nature of the conversation, the individuals involved, the subject matter, and the direction of the conversation. Listening also provides the listener with vital insights into where, when, why, and how your potential customers are talking about you or your brand. Listening for relevant content in social media can be difficult and requires understanding how to listen and for what.

### *Objectives of Listening*

The objectives of the listening phase are to understand the conversations that are currently happening around your brand. You will use tools that will tell you when your brand is mentioned on web sites, blogs, Twitter, publicly accessible Facebook pages, and more. Initially mentions may be nothing more than changes that you make to your own website or on your own blog, but eventually these mentions will begin to indicate when people are talking about you.

But what if there are no mentions of our brand? Not a problem, this is generally an indication that your brand is not being discussed or

mentioned on-line yet. This is a great opportunity for you to start conversations or seed discussion that is relevant to your brand without making a direct sales pitch. Remember that the tools that you use to listen and the terms you are listening to do not necessarily have to be brand names but could be keywords.

By listening you will find:

1. Where people are talking
2. What people are saying
3. How people feel about you
4. Problems & common concerns
5. Trends & opportunities

## ***Listening Tools***

Tools for listening to conversations on-line vary greatly and you may find over time that there are some that you prefer over others. For the purposes of this guide and assuming that you do not have any tools in place now, I recommend that you use the following tools as a starting point:

**Google Alerts** - Sign-up for a Google account. If you already have a Google Adwords, Analytics, or other Google related account, then you

do not need to create an additional account with Google. Go to <http://www.google.com/alerts> and create an Alerts account. You will create alerts for terms relating to your brand, your preferred keywords, your destination, even your competitors.

**Twitter** - Create a twitter account. This is not going to be used for posting messages necessarily but rather for research purposes to start. Avoid using your brand as the name of this account because you may not want others to know that you are using this account when you follow them. Once you have created a twitter account, download and install TweetDeck from <http://www.tweetdeck.com>. You will use TweetDeck to create stored searches which you will use to track conversations around your keywords on Twitter. As with Google Alerts, create searches for your brand, keywords, destination, and competitors. If your competitors are on twitter, use this account to follow them and follow what they are talking about.

There are a number of other tools available for monitoring conversations on-line. As you become more comfortable with the process, feel free to switch to another tool if appropriate. Remember that it is easy to keep adding tools without defining how best they fit into your strategy. If you can, find a tool that does what you do now and more, then switch to that tool and simply discard the old tool. The

goal here is to make your social media listening as simple and pain free as possible.

Another important aspect of listening is identifying where to listen and where you believe you need to listen. Part of this step is identifying some of the online communities where customers might be having conversations now about your business.

### ***Success Factors***

There is no clear return on investment for your time in listening to social media. The returns are somewhat intangible and can be more closely related to market research or market analysis. What you are doing during this phase is to understand and define what your social media strategy should be and how best to engage with your customers and potential customers. Some success factors to consider for the listening phase include:

- Creating a list of sites where your potential customers hang out.
- Find and follow your competitors.
- Understand what type of information your customers are looking for when they are on-line.
- Understand where you can start promoting conversations without a lot of work.

## Chapter Two - Engaging with your Customers

The Engagement phase is the second phase of the four step social media strategy and is the first step in connecting and conversing with your potential customers, partners, and vendors. The Engagement phase is all about joining into an existing conversation rather than starting your own conversation. During this step you are beginning to participate in discussions that are already happening on the sites that you discover during the listening phase.

The goal of the engagement phase is to begin building your reputation as an expert in what you do. The key here is to prove you are knowledgeable without being perceived as a salesperson. You are, in essence, proving that you walk the walk.

You may comment on a post or a question and provide insight into your particular destination or activity without outwardly promoting your brand. Remember, the idea here is to build credibility in your experience. As more people recognize your name and brand and associate it with the activity, the more trust you build with readers.

Remember these important engagement rules:

1. Respond quickly (once a day is fine).

2. Always respond as yourself and NOT your brand
3. Always be polite and professional.
4. Do not oversell or over promise in your responses.
5. Take sales questions off-line or into another channel. A good approach for example would be “I'd be happy to talk to you about that. Please send your contact information to me and we can talk offline”.
6. When commenting on posts, try to always be positive or constructively critical. Negative rants will undoubtedly leave a negative impression of you regardless of the context. Remember that you always want your brand and the experience to be associated with positive statements rather than negative ones.

## ***Objectives of Engaging***

Your objective with the Engagement phase is to be seen at the party. For example, when you go to a social gathering or a party you start by walking around and listening to conversations or looking for people that you know. When you find someone or hear something that interests you, you generally wait and listen some more finding an appropriate time to introduce yourself and become part of the conversation. That moment that you introduce yourself is the Engagement phase. In social media it is identified by you leaving comments on blog sites or social networking site that relate to your business or area of interest. When

you leave comments, for example, most sites will allow you to add a link back to your website. Instead of just using your generic home page address, consider linking to a profile page on your website that has more information about you and your role with the business. Be aware though, that your goal should not be to build link backs to your site. Many SEO “experts” or services will post comments on behalf of their clients just to build link backs. The results in this case are obviously flawed and will often get your IP address banned from commenting in the future. Focus on providing useful and relevant content that is keenly targeted at what you do or where your business is located. Here is a practical example of proper engagement strategy. Assume that these comments are for a blog post describing someone's experience in your destination:

An example of a less effective comment:

*“I love your post, it so interesting. I will come back often to read more.”*

Why is this post ineffective?

1. The grammar is poor. You would be surprised how many of these comments are floating around blogs and social networks posted by SEO companies.

2. It has no relevance to the subject of the post and is generic.
3. The commenter made no effort to engage with the writer or with other potential readers.

An example of an effective comment:

*“I’ve lived and worked in Northern BC for many years and being close to Banff I can absolutely agree that Banff is an amazing place to visit. There are so many cool things to do in and around Banff including horseback riding, some great hiking, skiing in the winter, rafting in the summer, and a whole host of other activities. Thanks for the great post, it was so nice to read someone else’s perspective.”*

This comment is much more effective because:

1. It relates to the subject matter of the post. It mentions a specific destination and the fact that you live and work in the area.
2. It adds value to the post by confirming that what the writer has written is true.
3. It contains lots of keywords relating to what you do and your business.
4. By acknowledging and thanking the author, you open the door to reciprocating in the future once you start contributing content on your own blog.

## ***Tools of Engagement***

No special tools are required for the engagement phase, however, I do recommend optional profiles for the purposes of properly branding your comments:

1. **Disqus.com** - Disqus is a shared commenting system used by many blogs. It allows you to post your comments to Twitter and share them on Facebook from the same profile. This is nice because you also share the link the site that you are commenting on which provides added value for the site owner. The Disqus system allows you add a profile photo to your account. This profile photo will appear whenever you leave a comment on any site. I recommend that you use a photo of yourself rather than your logo. Ideally, it is a picture of you wearing your logo!

2. **Gravatar.com** - Gravatar stands for “Globally Recognized Avatar” and, like Disqus, is used to associate a profile image with your email address. Gravatar is used on many blog sites to personalize comments left by visitors. The benefit of using a Gravatar is that you can brand your comments as your own. Whenever you post a comment on a site, your Gravatar will be linked to your email address automatically and your Gravatar image will be shown next to your comment. Again, make sure you use a photo of you rather than the logo because this will be much more personal and humanize your comments.
3. **Create a Profile Page** - If you have not already done so, create a page on your website about you. This is not an online resume but rather a place for you to talk a little bit about yourself, what you do, and why you love rafting. When you create your Gravatar and Disqus accounts and when you add comments to other websites, link to this page as your website link instead of linking directly to your home page. This serves two purposes, visitors are much more likely to click on the link if they can see that the page is going to provide more information about you, because people are naturally curious. Secondly, once they are on the site and they have satisfied their curiosity they are more likely to stick around and visit other areas of your site once they have come to know who you are.

## ***Success Factors***

A common fear with engagement, especially in the way I have recommended is that the person becomes mixed with the brand and as a result, there is confusion. This is, in my opinion, not a risk if the engagement is well executed. In order to avoid brand confusion, it is imperative that you always associate yourself with your brand when you leave comments or talk about yourself or your business. Most people are very capable of separating the person from the brand if it is distinct. Where it becomes difficult is that if you become more important than your brand. This will only occur if you are not diligent about making sure that you are always associated with your brand. Your success in engagement, unlike listening, can be directly measured through your analytics tools. For example your success can be measured by:

1. Increased link backs to your site (identified through Google Alerts).
2. Click throughs to your specific profile page (another reason to have it) measured through your analytics tools.
3. Improved Google search results (not guaranteed but likely depending on the level of engagement).
4. Increased mentions of your brand or site on third party sites.  
This may be in responses to your comments, through others

mentioning your comments, or through guest contributions on blogs.

5. If you use a referring code that can be tracked through an online booking engine, like [Rezgo](#), you should be able to measure revenue as it relates to engagement. To do this you will need to be able to pass a referral code from your main website through to your booking engine.

## Chapter Three - Articulating your Offer

The Articulation phase is also a transition phase in the social media strategy. It is transitional because during this phase you will shift from being a content consumer and commenter into a content producer. The articulation phase is about generating content that fulfills the customers' need for relevant information and details about your tours. During the articulation phase, your goal is drive demand for your products and services by inspiring the consumer to experience what it is that you offer. This phase is the most challenging for most because of the content production requirement. It is, however, also one of the most important steps because it confirms what you have learned during the listening and engagement phases and provides a framework for future engagement with potential customers.

To better understand the role that articulation plays in the social media cycle, you first have to understand the four phases of the travel buying life cycle. The travel buying life cycle consists of:

- **Dream:** During this phase the traveler imagines their dream vacation. They may not know exactly where they want to go yet, but they will picture themselves doing something, whether it is lying in a hammock on the beach, river rafting, skydiving, or sipping a Pina Colada. The point is that during this phase, the traveler is most susceptible to inspiration. The traveler will also

be doing a significant amount of research during this phase as they try to find ways to quantify and define their dream trip in a tangible way. This research will include reading blogs, review websites, destination websites, photos, and videos.

- **Plan:** During this phase the customer has defined some parameters for their dream trip. For example, they may have decided that they want to do something specific on their trip and now they will look for resources that will help them plan the trip around the activity that they want to do. During this phase the traveler will be researching around a very specific topic and will most likely be looking for sites that will help them decide what operators to use, what time of year to travel, and what the trip will cost (approximately). If you are lucky enough to be the reason why someone is traveling to your location, you should consider yourself privileged. Understand that most travel websites do not facilitate this phase very well. Most travel sites, especially those that sell travel products tend to require travelers to know in advance, when they want to travel and to where they want to go.
- **Go:** The traveler has planned and is ready to go. During this phase, the traveler is purchasing their tickets, committing to their trip, preparing to go and subsequently traveling.
- **Share:** The sharing stage of the travel buying life cycle is the

most easily forgotten but is also vitally important to your social media strategy. Unlike the other stages, this is where you have the opportunity to have your customers evangelize their experience with you and to share their trips with friends and family. These customer inspired reviews, comments, and stories are then used to inspire the next batch of travelers by feeding their Dream phase.

## ***Objectives of Articulating***

Your objectives are to:

1. Write content, take photos, and produce videos that help to inspire the traveler to go river rafting with you.
2. Provide the traveler with information that will help them plan their trip (whether or not it is with you).
3. Provide your potential customers with all the information they need to make a purchasing decision with you.
4. Give the potential customer the experience that they have come to expect from the materials you have provided for them.

## ***Tools of Articulation***

If your tour or activity website is not powered by a content management system (CMS) of some kind, I highly recommend that you

build or convert your existing site to use a content management system. Although there are many powerful CMS platforms including Joomla, Drupal, and others, I am particularly fond of the WordPress platform. The tool is free and extremely powerful allowing you to manage both your regular content pages, integrating your Rezgo booking engine, and offering a flexible blogging platform for creating search friendly content.

Additional modules that should be part of your blog include:

- Disqus comment system
- Gravatar support
- Facebook Connect Support
- Twitter support

These additional modules will increase the social sharing of your content and give your readers the ability to spread your content when and where appropriate. In addition to your blog you can now distribute your content from your blog to your Facebook fan page and through Twitter using Twitterfeed. In order to connect your blog to Facebook and Twitter you need to make the following adjustments:

- Facebook - Connect your fan page notes to your blog feed. Facebook will allow you to import your blog feed on a regular basis and re-publish your blog posts on your public fan page.
- TwitterFeed.com - Twitterfeed allows you to post notices to your twitter account whenever you add posts to your blog. It is

important that this should only be used in conjunction with regular conversational tweets. If not, your account will be perceived as a push marketing mechanism and will not be actively followed.

## ***Success Factors***

The articulation phase has a direct impact on two parts of the travel buying lifecycle (and the marketing funnel). Inspirational content will influence the user during the dream stage of the lifecycle (or awareness in the marketing funnel) and the planning stage (or consideration in the marketing funnel). You can measure your success by correlating bookings directly from content created for your blog or other third party sites. For example, if you write a piece of content for a local tourism board, make sure to use a Google Analytics referral code or associate a promotional code with the piece in order to directly track your conversions from these articles. If this is not possible, then measure your referral traffic through your analytics in order to compare direct traffic or organic traffic versus referrals from your blog or third party sites. It is important that this is measurable so that you can determine how successful your articulation practices are in terms of impact on your business. Remember that, although the direct marketing costs are limited, there is a time cost associated with the successful implementation of the articulation phase. If you take the time to listen

carefully to your audience and focus your writing efforts on addressing their specific needs, your results will be much better than if you simply attempt to write for the sake of attracting traffic.

## Chapter Four - Demonstrating your Expertise

This final phase is about demonstrating your comfort and use of social media. The purpose of the demonstration phase is to direct your customers and potential customers to YOUR social media places instead of engaging with customers in THEIR social media spaces. In essence, during this phase you are orchestrating and facilitating the conversations you have with your customers rather than just joining in on existing conversations. A simple analogy for this would be throwing your own party as opposed to going to someone else's party.

An important thing to remember with the demonstration phase is that customers will only participate with you in your space if they trust you and if they feel comfortable sharing with you. Even though you are having a party doesn't mean anyone is going to come. You need to invite them to your party and you need to make it worthwhile for them to come by providing something of value. In this case, you may provide them with access to photos of their tour, reviews, or a promotional offer for their next visit.

### ***Objectives of Demonstrating***

The objective of the demonstration phase is to better manage the conversations around your brand. Remember that like all social media, you will never be able to control the conversations, but you can

influence where, when, what, and how people talk about you on-line if you are listening to what they say and providing information that is relevant and timely for them (during the articulation phase). Your objectives in terms of demonstration will vary and change over time. I recommend, however, that you start with some very simple initial demonstration steps:

1. **Thank You Email / Request for Review** - If you are not currently sending a Thank you email to each and every customer, I recommend you start. This is a very straightforward way to keep the customer engaged even after they have completed a trip with you. In the email you can use the following wording:

*“Thank you for taking a trip with us and I do hope you enjoyed your experience. If you did enjoy your trip, I would really appreciate it if you would take a few moments to share your experience at:*

*<http://www.tripadvisor.com/Your-business-listing-page>*

*If there was anything about your trip that you felt did not meet your expectations, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at [your.name@yourbrand.com](mailto:your.name@yourbrand.com).”*

This email does a couple of important things. Firstly, it sets the expectation that you want your customers to give you feedback both good and bad, but more importantly, it sets out how you want to

receive that feedback. In this case, for good reviews you ask them to leave a review on TripAdvisor (or another review site of your choice). If the experience was not good or didn't meet their expectations, then you direct them to contact you personally to let you know. This channeling of intention doesn't necessarily guarantee that all reviews will be positive but it does set an expectation that the reviews are good experiences and the personal contact is for bad experiences. It also gives you an opportunity to rectify any problems with the customer before it results in a negative review somewhere.

2. **Your Twitter Account** - Okay, so you have now been using Twitter to follow people and to find out what people are saying about you on Twitter. You have already created a Twitter account and now you are starting to build a following, slowly but surely. Currently the Twitter account appears to be reposts of content that are being pushed out on the blog and the Facebook fan page. As mentioned in the articulation phase, it is important to remember that Twitter is a conversational tool (almost 40% of tweets are conversational). To that end, use Twitter as a way to connect with people who are already coming to your destination, looking for information about your offering, or ask questions about improving your business.

If you want people to engage with you in these social places, they need to know that you are actively participating and provide something

different in that place. One way to do this is to invite your existing customers to join you on Twitter and offer a unique promotion that is only available through your Twitter feed. Another way to continue the conversation is to invite your customers to follow you on Twitter before or after their trip with you. Remember that Twitter is a great way to send out alerts that may affect upcoming trips. For example “*Storm has passed and sun is coming out, all trips scheduled today are a go!*” or “*Sorry folks, conditions are poor today, please contact [you@yourbrand.com](mailto:you@yourbrand.com) today to reschedule*”.

3. **Facebook Page** - Facebook is a place where people like to share things like photos, videos, stories, etc. To make the most of your Facebook fan page, be sure to use it as a mechanism for sharing rather than Facebook version of your website or your blog. You can then invite your friends to become fans of your page.

Another important thing to remember with the Facebook page is that the promotions or content that you post should be different from the promotions that you run on Twitter and it should have different content than your website. Invite your staff to participate in the fan page by making them administrators of the page so that they can upload pictures and videos and write content on behalf of the company. I realize this may seem like a scary thing to do, but it will engage your staff in a much more intimate way and it will make them feel more

accountable for the company on Facebook.

## ***Tools of Demonstration***

There are many tools available for demonstrating your involvement in social media and your comfort with customer engagement. As a tour or activity company I recommend starting with the following on-line tools:

1. **TripAdvisor** - Use the existing mechanisms to drive more users to your profile page. As you build more reviews of your service on TripAdvisor, include a TripAdvisor badge on your website that links through to your profile page. Understand that TripAdvisor has a very strong brand and Google authority. The more you link to them, the more powerful TripAdvisor becomes. TripAdvisor offers an enhanced listing for approximately \$400/year. The service provides you with a link back to your website.
2. **Facebook** - You will want to focus as much attention on the business as possible and your business page is publicly accessible. Feel free to syndicate your blog posts through your Fan page and use it to post photos from your trips but try to create content that is relevant just to the Fan page. Since you will start with a fairly low fan base, you will need to make it more enticing for people to become fans by inviting them directly or giving them an incentive for joining. Invite your guests to post their own photos or videos and run a contest

exclusively on the fan page. For example, each month give away a trip for two for the best fan photo or video. Because Facebook fan pages are publicly accessible, I recommend you post photos and videos to the fan page first. Although Flickr is more photo oriented, we are not necessarily talking about high quality photos, these are for sharing purposes.

3. **Twitter** - Similar to the Facebook fan page, it is acceptable to use your Twitter account to re-post blog posts or notifications, but should not be the only content delivered through the account. Use your stored searches in Twitter to find out what people are talking about with regards to your preferred subjects and use your twitter account to respond to tweets from other users. This engagement will show that you are both listening and responding to customer (and potential customer) requests in the channel. When you contact customers via phone, email, or through the web, be sure to ask them to follow you on Twitter. WestJet has a weekly event called “Winglet Wednesday” where customers tweet their photos of WestJet winglets. The event has become a very popular part of the twitter experience. You could emulate this idea by doing a similar weekly event where you ask customers to post their photos to Twitter and mention your brand. The idea is to build interest by providing unique content that is geared towards the audience on Twitter rather

than simply re-hashing existing content.

There are a lot of social networks out there and lot of opportunities to participate. Focus on the the main social networks and add only where you feel the addition is valuable to your brand or reputation. By starting with the main ones first, you stand a better chance of getting familiar with techniques that can be applied to the other social networks you may wish to join.

## ***Success Factors***

Success in demonstrating is measurable by the number of people that choose to accept your invitation to connect and by the increase in brand recognition you receive. The primary ways to measure your success are:

1. Increase in the number of reviews that you receive.
2. An increase in the proportion of positive versus negative reviews. Remember that you will always receive negative reviews, it is how you handle them that defines your leadership in this space.
3. An increase in the number of fans and overall engagement of fans on your Facebook fan page. You will also find that your Facebook fan page will rank highly for your chosen keywords and your brand when searching on Google. This is why it is important to have it stand out differently from your regular website and blog.
4. An increase in Twitter followers and overall engagement of users

on Twitter. This may not be directly attributable to an increase in followers but could be because is actively engaging with other Twitter users. It is okay for your brand to follow a large number of users on Twitter, however, be careful not to follow spam followers or robots, because this will only result in spam filling your friend feed.

5. If you run any contests, then the level of engagement of the contests will also be a good indication of how involved your Fans are with your brand and how interested they are in receiving promotional messages from your brand. This is why I recommend that the contests be unique to the channel and have their own specific targets. In this way, you can effectively measure the success of each promotion by channel. Remember to check the terms of use for Facebook before you run any kind of contest, Facebook is very strict about these sorts of promotions.

## Chapter Five - Your Social Media Calendar

Being successful with your social media strategy means having a schedule that allows you to participate and actively engage with your various channels. I recommend you break up your tasks so that the work required to listen, engage, articulate, and demonstrate are staggered throughout the week. A sample calendar might look like this:

- **Sunday** - Take a well deserved break but keep listing. Check your Google Alerts and make note of any mentions that sound interesting.
- **Monday** - Respond to mentions on blogs that you hear over the weekend.
- **Tuesday** - If you are writing a blog, publish your article today. Tuesdays are the best day to post an article or send an email newsletter because most people are swamped with emails on Mondays. Continue to listen and respond to mentions as required.
- **Wednesday** - Post photos or videos to your Facebook page/Flickr/Youtube accounts.
- **Thursday** - Review your TripAdvisor profile pages and repond to reviews. Thank your customers when they post a review.
- **Friday** - Listen and respond to mentions and tweets.
- **Saturday** - Listen only. If you can, respond or just wait until

Monday.

You will probably find that as you become more comfortable with the social web, your mentions and hits will increase requiring you to listen and respond more quickly or more frequently. In most cases, responding can be done very quickly using your smartphone's Twitter app. In the case of the fan page or other blogs, simply make note of the mention and respond to it accordingly. Not every mention will require a response.

## Chapter Six - Simplifying the Strategy

Reduce the number of networks you join. You will find more success by focusing on key social spaces like Facebook or Twitter. That is not to say that other spaces will not be successful either, however, you will need to listening to learn what spaces will be important for your brand moving forward. To begin with, stick with the ones you know people participate on and draw the attention to yourself first. Once you have their attention, you can look at other networks.

When considering a new network or creating a new profile, consider following these steps before activating your profile:

1. Are people on this network my target customer (what is that)?
2. Are people on this network interested in what I offer?
3. Are there any other competitors on this network? If not, why not?
4. Are there other complimentary companies on this network? If not, why not?
5. Is this network friendly to companies?

### *Measuring Success*

Your success metrics are different from each step in the L.E.A.D. Cycle. To summarize, you can expect the following outcomes from each phase:

## Listen

1. Where users are talking about you
2. What users are saying about you and your brand
3. Where users are talking about your destination and activity
4. What information users are looking for and how they hope to get the information they want.
5. What questions are being asked about your type of tour or activities in your area.
6. What local organizations, tourism boards, etc. are doing around your activity and region.

## Engage

1. Increased link backs to your site (identified through Google Alerts).
2. Click throughs to your specific profile page (another reason to have it) measured through your analytics tools.
3. Improved Google search results (not guaranteed but likely depending on the level of engagement).
4. Increased mentions of your brand or site on third party sites. This may be in responses to your comments, through others mentioning your comments, or through guest contributions on blogs.

5. If you use a referring code that can be tracked through your tour operator software, such as [Rezgo](#), you should be able to measure revenue as it relates to engagement. To do this you will need to be able to pass a referral code from your main website through to your booking engine.

## **Articulate**

1. Increased referrals to your website from your blog or articles.
2. Increase in “time on site” as users read blog articles.
3. Increased blog search, web search, and mentions in Google Alerts.
4. Increased comments on articles and greater engagement with reading public.

## **Demonstrate**

1. Increase in reviews on sites like TripAdvisor
2. Increased follows on Facebook and Twitter (primarily).
3. Increased engagement from existing fans including comments, photos, and videos from followers.
4. Identify key evangelists of the business. This includes customers who love rafting.

At every stage there may be additional benefits or success factors that

have not been described. Remember that as you continue to listen for mentions, you might find opportunities to connect with other media sources both locally and outside your destination area. For example, as you build your fan base and can show engagement with customers local media sources (newspapers, radio, television) will look to authorities in certain segments. Follow your media sources and comment on articles that apply to your business. The important thing to remember is that if you demonstrate your expertise then media will default to those it perceives as experts.

## Chapter Seven - Reviewing the Plan

The plan you create based on this strategy should be reviewed on a regular basis to make sure that the objectives for each phase are being met. I recommend you schedule the following reviews into your social media plan:

**Monthly review** - This review should look at how effective you are at executing on your plan. For example:

- Are you listening for the right things? Are you getting any results for the keywords or phrases you have chosen?
- Are you responding to comments in a timely manner?
- Are you engaging with customers on Facebook and Twitter.
- Are you finding the weekly schedule too difficult to manage?
- Are you able to produce content at a reasonable and consistent rate?
- You should record, but not necessarily act upon follower and friend counts.

**Quarterly review** - At the end of each quarter you should take time to review trends in your metrics. Since you should have some more data to work with, your review should be focused on improving your success metrics as you have defined them. Some things to consider include:

- Are you gaining or losing followers and friends?
- How many mentions are you getting compared to the previous

quarter?

- Are you able to see referral counts in your analytics?
- How have your referrals change since the last quarter?

**6 Month review** - During the six month review you should take a hard look at your plan and determine whether or not you are seeing the results that you want for your chosen success metrics. This will be a good time to ask:

- Should you be listening for other phrases keywords, if so, what are they?
- Are there other social networks that may be more effective?
- If there are no social networks for river rafting enthusiasts, should you consider creating one?
- What other promotions can you develop around your chosen networks and communities.
- Are your success metrics the right ones? If not, what should they be?

## ***Knowing when to change***

The beauty of a social media is that it allows you to change tools and platforms without starting from scratch. Remember that the philosophies and techniques identified in this guide will work across any social network regardless of the focus of the network or the individuals

that participate. The key differences will be in the topics that the members find important and how you fit into the conversation. I recommend that as you do your monthly reviews, you make adjustments as needed to your plan in order to adjust for what you see and hear happening on the web. Conversations on the web will shift, which is why listening to them is so important. The opportunities that you lose will be the ones for which you were not listening.

Before you make the decision to change from one tool to another, be sure to ask yourself whether the gains from switching will outweigh the time cost of creating yet another social network profile. Remember that, like anything, if you do not commit to managing and maintaining the profiles you create, they will yield very few tangible results.

## Chapter Eight - Building Social Habits

In summary, the underlying goal of this strategy is to build corporate social habits for you and your tour or activity business. In the same way that you and your staff interact with people in the “real world” you should be interacting with them in a similar manner in the social web. The philosophies and techniques that you use to handle customer interactions face to face don't change when you handle customer interactions on-line, the only difference is the tool that you use. If you are able to apply strong customer service and messaging standards within your organization, they will translate into a positive and successful social strategy as well. Why? Because how a customer perceives you is based on expectations that you give them. If you provide the customer with the expectation that they will be cared for and treated fairly then they will come to expect that in the delivery of your service. As long as your service meets or exceeds their expectations, then they will have no problems with recommending you to their friends and family. If you are there to make that recommendation easy and straightforward, then you have the opportunity to drive continued return customers, or at the very least, a strong source for word of mouth referrals. A social media strategy does not live in isolation within your

organization but rather becomes part of the fabric of your company and your customers' experience. From the moment they see your promotion in Facebook to the moment they post their post-trip photos to your Flickr account, the opportunity to participate, share, and contribute is part of the fabric of the social web and should be a part of the fabric of your tour or activity company too.