



Expert Tips to grow your group sales

By Group Tour Media, publisher of *Group Tour Magazine* & *Student Group Tour Magazine*

Be social: Embrace the new conversation

Interview with Morgan Maravich, Destination DC
by Mary Lu Laffey, Editor, Group Tour Media

79% of the 2,100 companies surveyed for a Harvard Business Review Analytic Services Report use or plan to use social media. But only 12 percent believe they are using social media effectively.



Morgan Maravich of Destination DC getting social at the ballpark.

That's not the case at Destination DC. Morgan Maravich, Tourism Services Manager at Destination DC, started their group tour social media program in 2011. Entering year four, it has been tweaked, enhanced and measured each step of the way. The original goal remains the same: enhance communication with operators, educators, group leaders, and planners to engage them with what's happening in Washington, DC.

Armed with a yearly plan based on what is happening in the capital, Destination DC stepped into the digital conversation with an e-newsletter to be sent out quarterly. "We were careful not to distribute it too frequently," she said. "We make sure to send the e-newsletter out when we have important event important or new openings that have value [to the recipients]."

Big news, a big event or member information is not held for the newsletter. "We pop it up on our Facebook page," Maravich said. She uses FB as an outlet for real time news.

"In the last four years, we've noticed an increase in activity on Facebook—'likes' to the page, more comments, hash tags. It is so helpful to notice a reaction [to what we have posted]," she said.

Maravich credits part of that interaction to due diligence in recognizing opportunities to use social media. "We have encouraged those who read our e-newsletter to also follow us on our Facebook page for real-time updates.

"As part of our sales mission, when we are on the road and meeting with operators, posting on Facebook makes the visit more personal to all parties. We tailor the posts to the event, activities, and shows. We show our followers what is happening while we are on the road and who we are interacting with.

"Between Facebook postings and the newsletter, we have two great communication outlets to our clients," she said. "Our clients are on Facebook when many weren't there before."

Destination DC uses analytics to examine back-of-the-house engagement, specifically looking for insight into the habits of the user. How far down the page does a visitor scroll. Which events are touched and which are not.

"Seeing what parts of the page are utilized, what articles were of interest, really allows us to further engage our clients with more of those details and expand upon them more in the future."

Analyzing data is only one way Maravich keeps on top of the digital conversation. The other is real world conversation. "The feedback I get at shows and from mission trips goes into my reports. When our operators thank us for the e-newsletter and the valuable information inside, I know we are closing in on the communication gap. We are providing them with information that is important for their customers and everyday work. Our goal is to provide information that is helpful and we want to keep the communication flowing.

What lies ahead?

Use social media for real time reporting from the destination. Groups can post and tag their tour experiences as they happen. "It is a great way for people to find out about your company and what you are promoting," Maravich said.

Make it easy for them to book products from the social sites. Use a shopping cart of options with an accessible check out. Connections and bookings through social media networks already happening.

Morgan's 1-2-3:

1. Develop a social media plan, pick which networks are for your company, and take the jump. Promote your channels through all of your marketing from your website to newsletters.
2. Pick your posting strategy, voice, and tone. Engage your users. Keep the line of communication flowing at all times.
3. Be cognizant when scheduling communication. Don't send too much or too little.

Morgan Maravich, CTA, CSTP, is an active member of ABA, NTA, OMCA, and several motor coach associations. She was recently elected to the board of directors for SYTA and serves on the alumni board for George Mason University