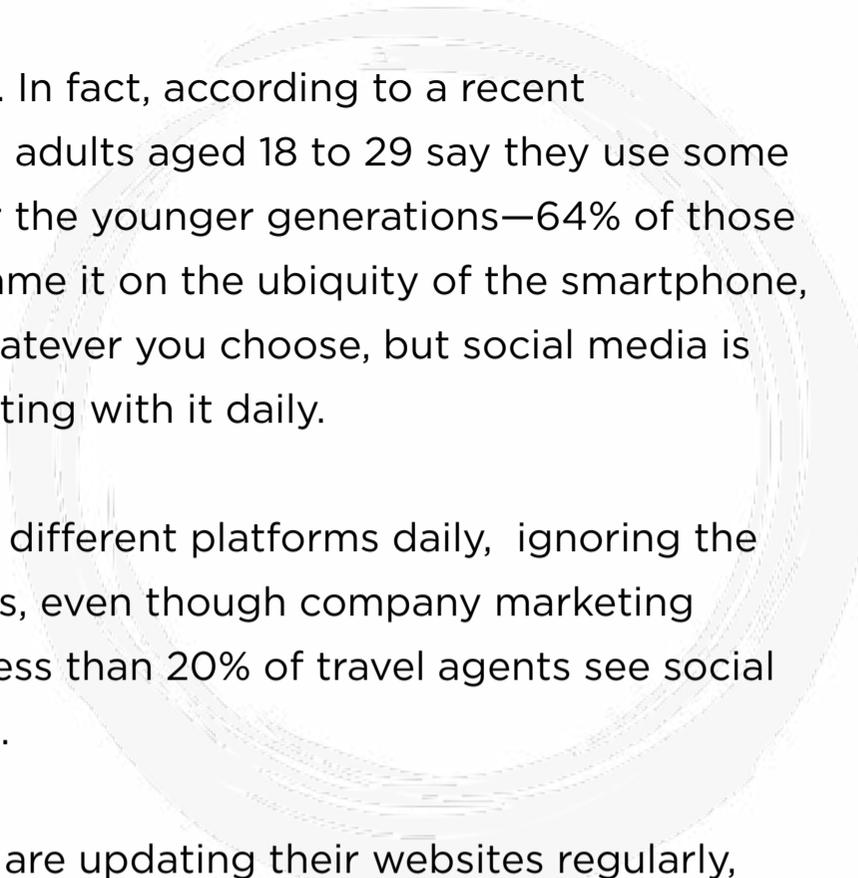




Show and Tell:
The Travel Agent's Guide to
Social Media Strategy



onyx
CenterSource



Social media is more prevalent than ever. In fact, according to a recent **Pew Research Center** survey, 88% of U.S. adults aged 18 to 29 say they use some form of social media. And it's not just for the younger generations—64% of those aged 50 to 64 are plugged in as well. Blame it on the ubiquity of the smartphone, the siren song of collecting “likes,” or whatever you choose, but social media is popular—and your customers are interacting with it daily.

With growing numbers of people joining different platforms daily, ignoring the trend isn't doing your business any favors, even though company marketing software company **Wishpond** says that less than 20% of travel agents see social as an essential channel for their business.

We're sure these late-adopting agencies are updating their websites regularly, sending out emails, going to trade shows and dropping the occasional piece of direct mail. But adding social media to the marketing mix isn't just something you should consider; it's something you must be doing now. Yesterday, even.

As Wishpond puts it, social media is unique. It allows you to communicate with clients (and potential clients) in a different tone and format than any other marketing channel. It lets you get to know your customers and to build and strengthen relationships. And when used correctly, it's a long-term, ongoing lead-generation machine.

There are a lot of social media guides out there. But as part of our continuing effort to serve travel agencies, **Onyx CenterSource** designed this simple guide to share strategies that specifically fit your goals, your business and your customers.

Happy clicking.

The Platforms

Before digging into our six strategies, let's take a quick look at the four most popular social media platforms. As you would expect, each one has its strengths and weaknesses. Which one(s) you use for your travel agency will depend on your goals and your personal preferences.

We're providing the basics of each platform, so we can delve right into strategy, but there are [plenty of resources](#) for a beginner's look at setting up a profile for each one.

Facebook

Since most people are on Facebook, this is the best place to start for almost any business, and that includes travel agencies. Plus, its basic functions are easy to use:

- Share clickable and shareable content and photos to your profile and audience.
- Generate new fans just by entering your current email list and using a low-cost page-promoting ad.
- More advanced (paid) features, like [Facebook Trip Consideration](#), let you target with even greater accuracy.

Twitter

While Facebook is more of an occasional thing for most people, Twitter is about up-to-the-minute news and real-time conversations.

- Building a Twitter following is a great way to communicate with travel lovers.
- Once you have that network, it's easy to share information, articles or promotions.

Instagram

Travel stories are easy to tell with great visuals. For that reason, many travel agencies see Instagram as the most important social network.

- Connect with followers emotionally, creating a real sense of desire for travel.
- Use hashtags and location tags to find new followers.

Pinterest

Another visual platform is Pinterest, although it's not as big or easy to use as Instagram.

- Create pinboards (a place where you save and organize images) of content to appeal to customers and potential customers.
- Link to your Facebook and Twitter accounts to increase the awareness of your pins.

Travel stories are easy to tell with great visuals.



1. Build Loyalty

Selling a trip is rewarding. Earning a loyal customer, however, is exponentially more profitable. You want a happy customer to come back to you to handle travel for her destination wedding, then a company retreat, then a family reunion, all while referring you to her entire network of friends and family.

With its unique communication and relationship-building qualities, social media can help you make that happen more often. Building brand loyalty is all about constant, engaging contact with your customers. Think of this example: If you almost equally enjoy the burger at two different restaurants, but one of them has an engaging, authentic social media account that you view daily and the other does not, you are more likely to patronize the engaging burger place because they stay top-of-mind for you.

You can achieve this too. Make sure you understand the stage your audience is at in their buying journey and update your content accordingly. Having sales-ready page visitors is every businesses' dream, but in reality, you're communicating with people whose trust you need to earn. Earn it by creating compelling and helpful content that people will remember when it comes time to plan their next adventure.

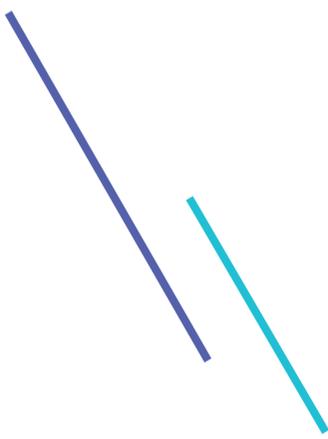
This kind of content doesn't need to take up all of your time and resources. Use free tools across the internet, like [Pixabay](#) for images and [Canva](#) for easy template design, and you're in business!



2. Be An Expert

Social media is about enhancing your brand, as well as your reach. So whatever you're doing, stay focused on your agency's niche and the interests of your core customers. If honeymoons are your forte, your social media content should reflect that. If you know Asia like no one else, your Instagram posts should have unique photos of hidden travel treasures in Hong Kong, for instance, and your Twitter chat should show off that expertise.

Every travel agent and agency has its strengths. Social media is the place to show how much you know and generate share-worthy content. And remember, stay passionate! If your love and enthusiasm for travel isn't genuine, your followers will know it, and they'll be less likely to engage with you.



Generate share-worthy content.



3. Don't Go Everywhere

Your travel agency doesn't specialize in every destination. You can't have relationships everywhere. It's the same with social media. Focus on the sites that work best for you and your goals.

Here's a social media strategy that doesn't work: Register for every platform, put social media links on your website, then sit back and wait for the leads to roll in.

If you know where your audience lives and you can narrow your scope to one or two social media platforms, it makes it even simpler to become a seasoned platform veteran, rather than being a master of none. Having the time and energy to produce quality graphics and engaging content specifically designed for your chosen platforms will do more to engage potential customers than a lukewarm campaign across all platforms with a broader audience.

... chosen platforms will do more to engage potential customers than a lukewarm campaign...

4.

Get Personal

What's the one thing your travel agency has that no other agency in the world has? You.

In the one-to-one, relationship-building world of social media, getting personal is a good thing. When you share personal stories, trips, and tips, you're humanizing your business, which is already one of the most compelling reasons customers have to use a real-life travel agent versus booking online. Capitalize on being a person, not an algorithm.

Just like with face-to-face relationships, the more you allow someone to get to know you, the closer you get. And closeness leads to loyalty. So post that adorable picture of your dogs and let your followers see you outside of the agency, but, fair warning: use this strategy sparingly.

You don't want to put so much personal content on your profile page that people can't tell what your business is about. Flashes of your personality help humanize your business, but too many can become confusing for casual page passerbys.

A 2:1 ratio should be healthy. For every two business-related posts you add, you can add one personal post.



5. Have Conversations

As we've noted, the travel business is largely relationship-based. Fortunately for every travel agent with a presence, social media is too.

The capability to hold genuine online conversations between people – or between customers and companies – is the primary attraction and strength of social media.

Capitalize on the “social” in social media by joining the conversation with current and prospective clients in a positive way (no political rants on your business page, please).

Conversations don't have to take the form of a dialog. There are limitless ways to have online interactions with your current and potential customers:

- Encourage customers to use your brand hashtag and tag your page in their posts. This increases their post visibility and directs attention and traffic to your profile.
- Post an occasional survey or travel test (but make sure you share the final results).
- Ask your network for specific travel suggestions or reviews.

One word of warning: Monitor all hashtags, page mentions or reviews closely. If something negative comes up in your feed, take a deep breath and address it in a non-combative way.

The social aspect of most platforms is what makes them fun—and a great audience learning experience. Don't be afraid to engage and see where a topic takes you.



6. Be Promotional

Although you don't want to deluge your social media audience with promotional messages, don't avoid this age-old practice completely. After all, promotional offers are going to be the content that pushes your audience to purchase.

Think like a more personalized OTA. As we mentioned before, one of the small-business travel agents most unique selling points is that they're human, and they will work for you. Find the package, discounts, and specials that fit your audiences unique needs and post a deal they can't refuse. Mention the option for customization of your offerings and you'll have them in the palm of your hand.

... promotional offers are going to be the content that pushes your audience to purchase.



7.

Measure Your Reach

One of the best aspects of social media is that most platforms have a way to measure a return on investment. While it's not a perfect science—unless you are willing to invest in some sort of lead management software—once you've had time to engage your audience, make sure to measure the outcomes. Here are some important universal metrics to be on the lookout for:

- Page mentions
- Overall engagement
- New followers
- Clicks to website
- Increase in positive reviews

None of these metrics mean much, however, if you don't see an impact to your business' bottom line. If you see positive trends, but no pick up in business or revenue, it may be time to reassess your approach, utilize something new, or put a little bit of money behind a post.

It's possible that your business will pick up, and you'll need help tracking and recovering your increase in commission payments, in which case, [Onyx CenterSource has a solution for you.](#)

What's your #1 social media rule as a travel agency? Let us know on the [Onyx CenterSource Facebook page.](#)

About **Onyx Centersource**

Onyx CenterSource is a leading global provider of B2B payments and business intelligence solutions to the hospitality industry. The company strives to build long-lasting relationships with its partners and is passionate about providing quality customer service, consultative insight and cost-effective solutions. With a legacy dating to 1992, the company facilitates in excess of \$2.1 billion in payments annually, partnering with more than 150,000 hotel properties and 200,000 travel booking providers in 160 countries.

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