



Promoting your product 3: social media

In recent years online marketing has been taken to a new level with the explosion of social media (also known as web 2.0) channels. Where listing your business on tourism websites, then operating your own website was once considered the benchmark for online promotion, channels like Facebook, Blogging, and Flickr are now becoming increasingly useful as a marketing tool.

People are going digital:

- 80% of New Zealanders use the web
- 83% of users research products online
- 60% of users buy products online
- Domestic e-commerce over \$1.5 billion in 2007.

Around half of that is in travel and tourism.

(AUT Study Dec 2007)

Web 2.0 overview (warning – it gets a bit technical)

In the late 1990s the main programming language that built the internet and its content (HTML) was replaced with a new language that separated content from design (XML), meaning online content could now be easily reproduced, monitored, created and updated, by almost anyone with a computer.

This shifted the role of the internet from companies talking at customers through their websites to customers talking to each other about the company's products, and everything else. Content can now be added to the internet from almost any mobile phone as it happens, rather than the old model of writing text, sending it to a web firm who formatted and coded it, and then uploaded it to the World Wide Web.

Examples of Web 2.0

The shift to user-generated content created an explosion of new websites, all focused on the site users providing content, rather than the funding company. The leading sites in Web 2.0 fall into 3 broad groups:



1. Blogger.com / BlogSpot.com / BlogTown.co.nz

A Web Log, or Blog, is like an online diary, with content that can include photos, movies, words, audio, and the subject can be anything you want to include. Anyone can create one in a matter of seconds for free.

Because of this there is a lot of clutter amongst blogs - a recent report claimed there were over 133 million web logs in late 2008, but only 7.4 million had been updated in the previous 3 months.



Photo: Rob Tucker

2. Facebook.com / MySpace.com / Bebo.com / SecondLife.com / Twitter.com

These 'social networking' sites refine the online diary model of a blog to present more of a personal bulletin board. Viewers can view what you're doing, what you like, dislike, and who your friends are, usually from a single page.

The one worth watching from a product promotion viewpoint is Facebook, which offers a group function where you can easily communicate with people who have joined your group – such as existing customers. The target audience for Facebook is increasingly mature, where the others listed tend to remain largely youth focused.



3. YouTube.com / Flickr.com

YouTube, Flickr, and countless similar sites offer what is essentially an online photo album – YouTube with short video clips, and Flickr with more conventional static images. Content can easily be shared with friends, family and customers around the world, making it a very cheap way to provide a full picture of your business.



Tips for making the most of your web presence:

- Build Web 2.0 into your wider communications activity. Running a blog or a FaceBook presence alone won't generate new customers, but linking the blog to your website and other sites could.
- Build an online presence for the future. Make sure you have the time, energy, and content to be able to sustain whatever web 2.0 activities you start.
- To choose you, they have to find you. Become familiar with search engines, links, and rankings, and look to optimise your business's presence.
- Review all online content regularly. Good content leads to good results.
- Before you post any content online, ask whether it is relevant to your audience. Viewers are becoming smarter, and increasingly focused in their browsing.

Remember the Four C's of web content:

- **Consistent.** Your website is as much a part of your brand as any other aspect of your business
- **Comprehensive.** People use the internet to make decisions. Having complete information about your product will help them choose you.
- **Correct.** Wrong information is common online, but can be very damaging.
- **Current.** General rule: allow as much time and money for ongoing updating as you budget for creating the site.

