

## **Social networking sites - a marketing channel opportunity?**

Nick Booker, Director, Attract Marketing Ltd one the UK's leading visitor attraction, destination management and leisure sector consultancies.

### **Background**

Flickr, one of the leading photo sharing web sites on the web has an element of commercial content on and I was interested in discovering whether anyone considered it seriously as part of the marketing mix. If so does it work? So, I posed a question on Linked In the networking site for business professionals. This short article is based on the answers received.

My own experience is that I registered Attract Marketing - the consultancy I'm a director of, as a member with some pictures drawn from our tourism/Visitor attraction clients and also set up Tourism Group. Both have generated some interest and the links are at the end of this article.

The key points from the research are that:

- Flickr is a marketing resource
- There are some basic principles to follow
- Make sure you buy a 'pro' membership
- Join Groups
- It provides additional in bound links to your main web site
- As with all web sites keep the content fresh and up to date

### **Using Flickr and other sites**

Depending on the industry you're in, Flickr can be very handy as an \*additional\* tool to your marketing arsenal. It's not the main focus, but it can be useful for additional public relations or 'conversational marketing.'

*Peer Lawther, Online Social Media Marketing Thinker & Doer* works on behalf of three national museums so Flickr is wonderful for broadcasting their archives to new audiences. One of the museums featured in 'The Commons' on Flickr in September.

However, if your industry sector isn't given to images and/or photos then of course it's not somewhere you should focus your time. There are countless other social and business media networks that could work better.

If you do want to use Flickr, then add images that are emotive and thematic. No one cares for 20 photos of a gizmo, each taken from a slightly different angle, unless you're Apple. They need to be in context, make the images honest and everyday and maybe add some interesting background information that viewers can relate to, then other users are naturally going to look at your images. Also, remember to add the place names to your image tags and descriptions.

Groups are a very good way of talking to people that perhaps wouldn't come across your images or profile, and there is a group out there in Flickr for everyone. However, remember the rules of community apply here as they do on any social media site. These need to be observed first before communicating in an honest and open way.

On a one-on-one level, people can be 'befriended' by clicking on 'add as a contact', in their profile. But remember to keep it sweet; don't just click willy-nilly around the site. You should choose thematic friends, or ones that share an interest in photographing similar things to images in your account. So Attract for example links with photographers and groups involved with tourism and attractions such as museums. You can also write testimonials for photographers you do like, like a LinkedIn recommendation, these are always good to give and receive.

You need to ensure that you've got a Pro account, about \$28 a year. No one will take you seriously if you don't. The images should be well sized as you hope that someone will like your images, become a fan of them, or download them as PC wallpaper. Ideally try to make them landscape and 1280 pixels wide at the very least. Also, don't stick a mighty great watermark over the top of them. This is the social media world, that's not done anymore!

Another thing is to make sure you name the account so it has a permanent and tidy URL - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nationalmediamuseum/> for example, not a URL with the big long number at the end of it that Flickr gives it. You can change this in 'your account' then 'Your Flickr web addresses'.

Peer has used Flickr for a couple of roles, showing off videogame screenshots when he worked for a games company, (which worked very well and then of course working for the Science Museum, Media Museum and Railway Museum. These tie in very well with Flickr!

He concludes saying one should remember to update frequently; it will refresh your account, mean your work appears for your contacts more regularly, and also mean you are hopefully working on your skills as a photographer!

*Pamela Anderson, a Marketing Account Manager* has been on Flickr for quite a while. She says there are some grassroots marketing strategies but it takes a lot of time and effort. As we have seen earlier, pro membership is vital as Flickr users are very fickle and will not pay attention if the little 'pro' tag is not beside your name.

Also, join groups, be active in commenting, and post your business link on your profile. People will go from there. Pamela gets loads of hits to her personal blog.

Jon Hickman, a Media Researcher, Lecturer and Designer believes that done right Flickr can be quite powerful, but many people are not doing it correctly. Jon met a photographer recently and he said Flickr wasn't any use to him,

and did nothing for his business. His problem was not tagging his photos properly. Once he had done that, it generated a lead the same day.

There is no point in just throwing stuff up there. It needs to be tagged and described appropriately. In the case of the photographer, it was simply localising his place in the market to Birmingham and it generated a commission.

For Facebook again it will really depend on the product or service. With Facebook more than Flickr tread lightly and carefully. It is a social space although there is the ability to register companies. But ideally you need to give some element of social value to the users or risk upsetting them. A growing number of consultants are using face book to network with other consultants and potential clients.

An example quoted by Jon, is a Birmingham pub due to be closed to make way for development. A Facebook group was set up to organise opposition to the closure. While the group will probably be ineffectual, it's something of a *fait accompli* but it seemed important to Jon to show some solidarity and he was happy to be a member of the group.

But then the group started being used as a channel to tell Jon about drinks promos, quiz nights, latest news, etc. As he said, "This isn't what I signed up for, so I've left the group."

The lesson here is that in the Facebook environment and indeed other similar sites one needs to be respectful of the relationship, and stick to the principles that people have signed up for. But that doesn't mean you can't use it for more generalised marketing, but be explicit that that is the reason for the group. An example of this distinction within would be a general "Friends of..." group for a museum or attraction, as opposed to a group concerning a specific fundraising effort, exhibition, etc.

Facebook is a network of social connections and linkages, so it is appropriate to have multiple areas for one organisation. So in the example above one could have both a broad presence and then separate niches of interest with their own pages. Facebook is good at working out the linkages between interest groups and offering options for users to drill down into other areas.

*Gareth Edwards, an eMarketing Specialist* at The National B2B Centre at Warwick University often recommends Flickr, amongst other social media sites as a site to place content on. Some people he has dealt with have put product photos on and others, like Attract Marketing are fortunate enough to have dual purpose content, pictures that are of general interest and also promote the particular location.

Pictures can also be logged on sites like Stumbleupon, [www.stumbleupon.com](http://www.stumbleupon.com) which is a user nominated content site. One of

Gareth's my clients had a real surge in traffic after putting a reference up there. Then if you have video material then put it on YouTube.

All of these tools create inbound links for search engines and provide the opportunity for real visitor traffic too.

*Gianluigi Cuccureddu an Advertising Consultant at Traffic4u* feels depending on the market sector, Flickr would definitely be a marketing opportunity. 'It creates emotion, spirit, engagement', people can make photos their favourites and so on. He emphasises the need to pay attention on tagging and descriptions and to include the main web site URL for the search engines to pick up. Gianluigi finally made the point of not being overtly commercial as one of his Flickr accounts got deleted because it was too obviously commercial.

To conclude Flickr does have a role in marketing but like most things in life and business you get out of it what you put in. Use it carefully and stick to the rules and it will work for you

Attract Marketing's web site is at [www.attractmarketing.co.uk](http://www.attractmarketing.co.uk) and its presence on Flickr is at:

[www.flickr.com/people/attract\\_marketing\\_tourism\\_and\\_attraction\\_consultancy](http://www.flickr.com/people/attract_marketing_tourism_and_attraction_consultancy)

and

[www.flickr.com/groups/attract\\_marketing\\_tourism\\_and\\_attraction\\_consultancy](http://www.flickr.com/groups/attract_marketing_tourism_and_attraction_consultancy)

Finally thanks to

Peer Lawther - Online Social Media Marketing Thinker & Doer

Pamela Anderson - Marketing Account Manager at Media General

Jon Hickman - Media Researcher, Lecturer, Designer & Consultant

Gareth Edwards - eMarketing Specialist at The National B2B Centre

Gianluigi Cuccureddu - Advertising Consultant at Traffic4u

You can find them all and me on Linked In at [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

**Nick Booker**  
**Director**

**Attract Marketing Ltd**