

# A PLAYBOOK FOR AMPLIFYING YOUR HOTEL'S STORY ON SOCIAL MEDIA



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A good story is never told just once, but rather is told over and over by different people. Social media offers hotel marketers an ideal platform for telling a hotel's story in a way that's widely accessible and and shareable. Digital marketing is rapidly evolving, especially when it comes to visuals. Here you'll learn the basics of visual storytelling and how to build a social strategy to amplify your hotel's story across the most popular social sites. This playbook is for hotel marketers who aspire to become social media champions by increasing engagement with guests, developing a community and inevitably driving bookings.



**Darlene Rondeau**  
Vice President Best Practices, Online Merchandising  
VFM Leonardo



**Many companies that are active on social media have what the marketing world calls a “Social Media Playbook.”**

Ranging from a few pages to novel length, these playbooks lay the ground rules for the company’s social media strategy. They address things like how often to post on Facebook, which hashtags to use and how to respond to comments. But we’re not here to tell you how to play the social media game as a whole. In this playbook, we’re going to focus on one very important part of the social media and digital marketing game today – visual storytelling. More specifically, we’ll lay out the general plays that will help you amplify your hotel’s unique story on the most popular social media channels.






**Let’s get started.**

“52% of travelers use social media for vacation inspiration.”<sup>a</sup>

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## Why Enter The Social Media Game?

With 52% of travelers using social media for vacation inspiration<sup>c</sup>, it's no wonder more and more hotels are getting in the game. Here's a look at why it's so important for hotel marketers to include social media in their digital marketing game plan.

-  **It's growing.** Facebook, the quarterback of the social media team, has 1.15 billion monthly active members all over the world.<sup>d</sup> Twitter continues to gain new users, growing 44% from 2012-2013. YouTube continues to dominate the world of online video with over 6 billion hours of video being viewed each month and Google+ is showing a steady climb with 33% more users from 2013.<sup>g</sup>
-  **Your guests are on it.** In fact, 70% of travelers update their social media channels while on vacation. They share updates and photos of hotels, which in turn inspire their network of friends to take a trip!<sup>e</sup>
-  **It influences bookings.** You know your guests are spending their time on social media channels, did you know they also book directly from them? 50% of travel companies have seen direct bookings generated from social media channels.<sup>f</sup>
-  **It's real-time.** Give and get instant feedback, with which you can continually develop, expand, reinvent and refine your offerings to meet the wants of your customers.
-  **It's a research tool.** When you find yourself wondering what travel shoppers are sharing and saying about your property or brand, a quick search makes it simple! Investigating has been made easy with the help of hashtags on social channels like Twitter, Facebook and Google+.

"#socialmedia is the new word-of-mouth marketing."<sup>b</sup>

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# How To Play The Social Media Game (And Win)

**Learn the game.** Whether you're a social media rookie or a pro, make sure your knowledge of social media is always in top shape. With all of these social channels (and more entering the scene), it's important to stay focused. Devote your time and energy to amplifying your story on those social channels your guests are using. Here's a quick run-down of the most popular social networks and their visual storytelling features:



**Facebook** continues to evolve to include more

and more photo and video sharing features; its "Timeline" is visually-driven and the perfect place to display large, engaging visuals.



While **Twitter** remains in the realm of 140-character

info-bites, there are increasingly more photo and video sharing features available for sharing stories in real-time.



**Pinterest's** entire interface is inherently visually-based,

with boards and pins represented by images. This visual pinboard broke a record by gaining 10 million users in just 9 months.<sup>h</sup>



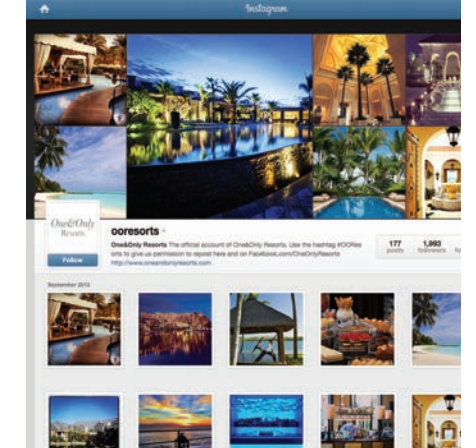
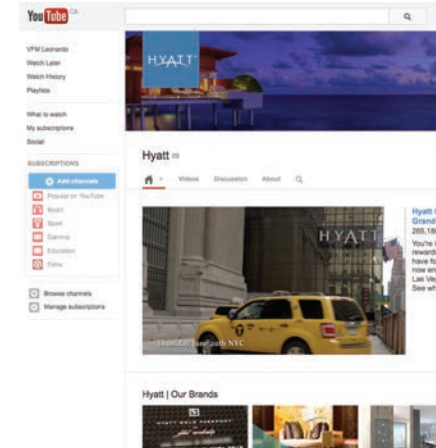
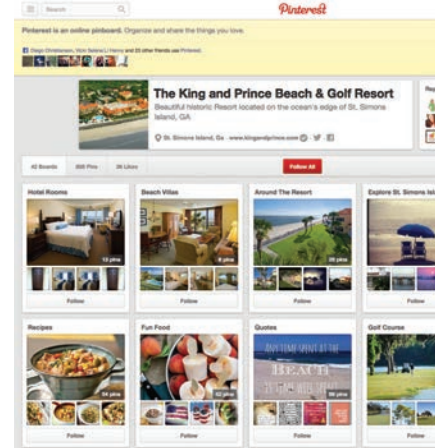
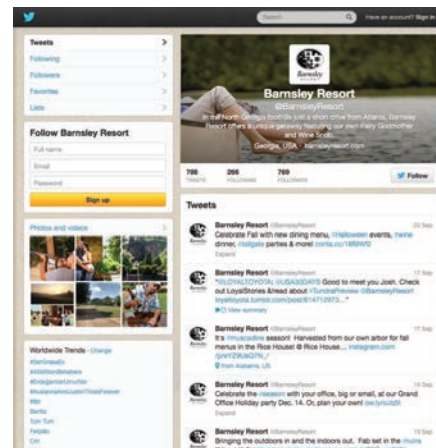
**YouTube** sees 800 million unique users per month

– watching more than 4 billion hours of video during this time period, making it a great place to share a video that tells your story.



With its retro filters and snap-and-upload

simplicity, mobile photo-sharing phenomenon, **Instagram** has proven extremely popular. Now with a video component, why not try sharing Instagram tours of your hotel?



## Establish Your Game Plan

Now you're familiar with the platforms available for sharing your story on social media, but do you know what your story is? Ask yourself these questions to begin tackling your storytelling strategy:

- ▶ What do guests usually comment on about your hotel?
- ▶ Have you recently renovated?
- ▶ How do you welcome guests upon arrival?
- ▶ Do you have a staff member who's particularly well-known with guests?
- ▶ Are you located close to local attractions or a business park?
- ▶ What is your city or local community known for?
- ▶ Do you offer any special services for children? Pets?
- ▶ What is your target market? Corporate travel? Weddings? Meetings?

Any of these answers are a jumping off point to help you share your unique message with travel shoppers. So what makes a winning play and irresistible story?

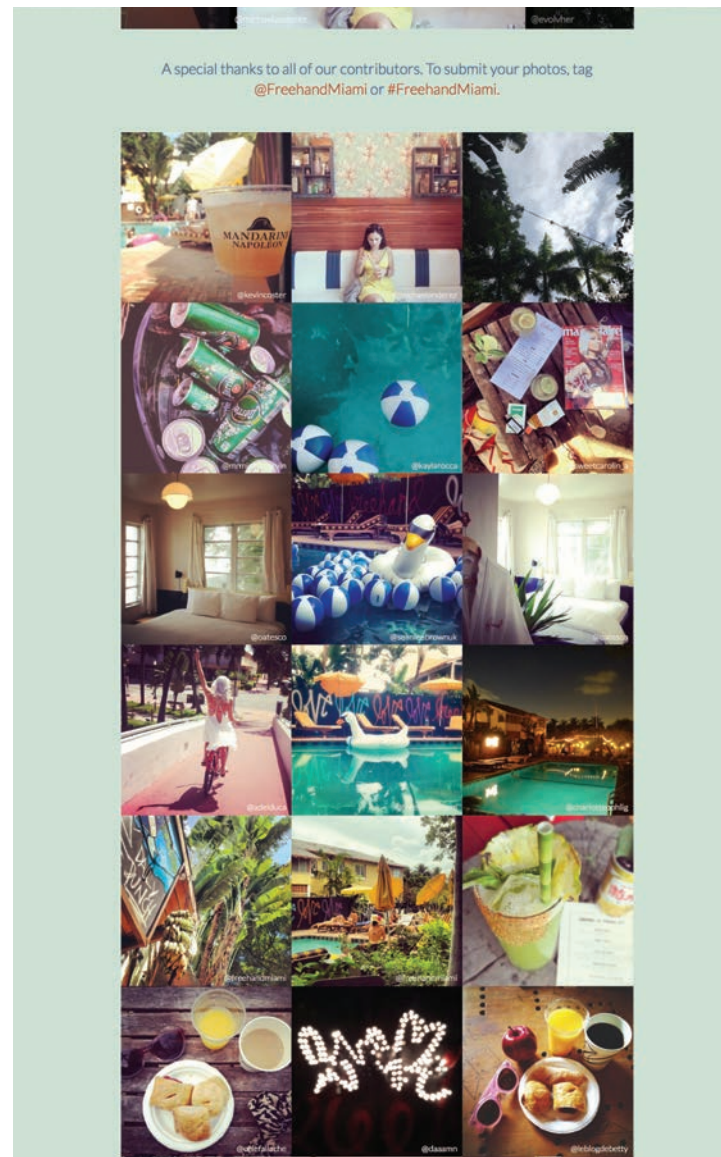
- ▶ It's relevant
- ▶ It's authentic
- ▶ It's simple to understand
- ▶ It's shareable
- ▶ It appeals to the audience's feelings
- ▶ It offers the audience a chance to add to the story by contributing or sharing
- ▶ It's amplified across social channels, mobile devices and websites
- ▶ Your hotel is comprised of many small stories that support your overarching message - share them!

Being a good storyteller means being dynamic and interesting with a message people can't help but want to share.

## Show The Whole Picture

Contrary to what you may think, every hotel has a story to share. Whether it's how you got started, who works with you, where you're located or who your guests are. The most memorable stories are accompanied by strong, striking visuals. Just think, wouldn't you rather watch the football game on your plasma TV than listen to it on a radio? Of course you would. Instead of just telling travel shoppers who you are, show them with vivid photos, videos and virtual tours.

Cover the basics by showing your guestrooms, restaurant and amenities – but make sure what you're showing is interesting. In addition to your professional photography, try sourcing photos from guests, or encouraging hotel staff to take pictures at the property. The **Freehand Hostel in Miami** (pictured right) uses crowd sourced content for their website, which exudes a hip, authentic feel. Using guest's photos (with permission) will engage them, too!



There's much more to a hotel's story than what's inside its walls. Take the opportunity to showcase local attractions, like festivals, parks, colleges or events.

Some of the most successful brands on social media channels are keeping it real by getting personal. Even **the White House tweets** (shown below) some fun, personal content in the midst of official press releases and important news updates.





There is a reason reality TV shows have been more than a passing trend; they engage worldwide audiences because the characters are real people sharing their personal experiences. Show your personality by sharing content that makes your hotel uniquely “you”.

Your staff plays a crucial role in the guest experience and are important characters in your hotel’s story. Why not shine the social media spotlight on your MVPs? It could be a photo of your front desk attendant whose sunny disposition keeps guests coming back or, a video of your chef preparing a popular menu item. Hotel staff members are your star players and the face of your hotel. Let their light shine across your social media efforts.

## Tune Into the Commentary

The days of anonymous comment cards are behind us. Social media is the new word-of-mouth marketing and guests are reviewing your hotel, sharing their comments and helping define your hotel’s story across many of these networks. Don’t be left wondering what travel shoppers are saying about you. Social media is a powerful resource for learning what guests and prospective guests think about your property.



A quick and handy way to discover what’s being shared on social media is by searching using hashtags. Hashtags are a word or phrase preceded by the # symbol to identify a keyword or topic of interest. Try searching your hotel name with a hashtag before it on Twitter, Facebook or Google+ to see what people are posting about you.

When you’re deciding what story you want to share about your hotel, keep your eye on what photos and comments guests are posting during their stay with your hotel, are they admiring the view from their guestroom window? Sharing a picture of the new in-room coffee maker? Instagramming an image of their meal from your restaurant? Listening to the story guests are sharing about you can help you form a compelling story from a fresh perspective.

## Include Your Fans

Listen to dinner party conversations, office banter and coffee shop chit chat, people are always talking about their travels. It's a topic that everyone can participate in on some level and travelers in particular love to share their pictures and experiences with their social networks. Now that you've tuned into guests commentaries of your hotel on social channels and are aware of what they're saying about you, it's time to take the next step and interact with your fans online.

Your story can grow legs of its own when you encourage conversations around it. Invite travel shoppers online to engage with your story by commenting, contributing or sharing. Strike up a conversation by:

- ▶ Including a call to action, like a link to your website
- ▶ Tweeting at them
- ▶ Asking people to retweet your content
- ▶ Encouraging them to tag you in Instagram posts
- ▶ Featuring fans in your Facebook posts, with permission
- ▶ Use active language by including verbs when you can
- ▶ Asking questions followers can respond to
- ▶ Be ready to respond to comments on all social channels
- ▶ Keep posts short and sweet with simple language

The **Broadmoor Resort** in Colorado Springs stands out on Twitter by regularly responding to tweets and engaging with followers.



Turn enthusiastic customers into a powerful marketing force, and recruit loyal clients to become evangelists and encourage sales through their own recommendations. The biggest reason people turn to friends and family for recommendations is because of trust, according to Klout. Your best marketers and salespeople, are among your most loyal, engaged, enthusiastic, and valuable guests. Your fans will be more enthusiastic when they feel a personal connection to your hotel through social network interactions.



## You Are The Champion

**Engaging with social media can be as exciting as scoring the winning touchdown at the big game.** It's an interactive, fun and lively platform that serves both your hotel and your guests. The evolution of social media platforms makes visual storytelling critically important, so make your posts, tweets and pins stand out in a memorable and shareable way.

When crafting your social media strategy, remember, every single hotel has a unique story. Seek out what makes you special and share it across the social networks that work best for you. Post both professional and amateur photos to give your story the visual edge it needs to catch the eye of online travel shoppers. Pay attention to what's being shared about your property online and stay on top of emerging social media trends to know how to create a story worth amplifying. Show off your skills and interact with fans to make everyone in the vast social media stadium feel like they're part of the team.

Finally, remember that the most memorable stories are accented with images, virtual tours and videos that allow the person to envision themselves at your property. Share content that guests want to amplify by posting engaging images, and you'll be a champion in no time.

**"Engaging with #socialmedia can be as exciting as scoring the winning touchdown at the big game."**



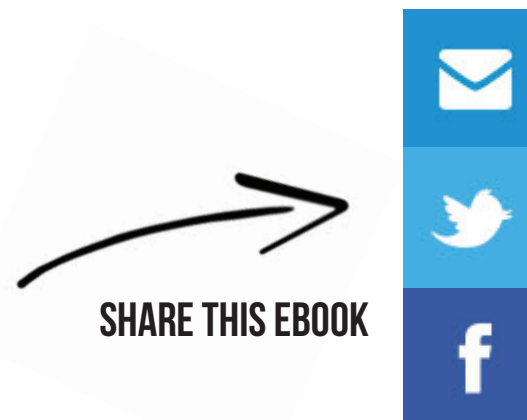
## About VFM Leonardo

**VFM Leonardo** is a technology and online media company for the global hospitality industry. We provide e-marketers at hotel brands, management companies and hotel properties with technology, sales conversion tools and a global travel media network that enables them to better visually merchandise their hotels to millions of in-market travel shoppers monthly.

Our core products, the **VScape® Digital Asset Management System** and **VBrochure™ Online Merchandising System**, leverage the **VNetwork™** - the largest media syndication network in the industry. It includes all major search engines, Global Distribution Systems, online travel agencies, travel research and supplier websites, search portals, review, travel editorial, local directories and major social media and video sharing sites.

Taking advantage of VBrochure's mobile and social media platforms, hotels can ensure that their rich visual presentations reach consumers on their mobile devices and through their social graphs.

For more information about VFM Leonardo, visit [www.vfmleonardo.com](http://www.vfmleonardo.com).





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