



10 smart ways to use Facebook to increase your inn's occupancy

You surely agree that Facebook is a great tool to keep in touch with friends, past guests and guests-to-be. Here are a few not-to-be-missed tips on how to use Facebook cleverly -- and without spending a penny - - to increase your guest contact and occupancy.

#1 The basics

You need to open a business page for your inn. You can do it only if you have a personal account, but keep your personal posts separate from the business ones. Your goal, of course, is to fill rooms by increasing guest awareness of your Inn. However, your posts should mainly entertain, inspire and inform followers and not explicitly advertise your place. Here's how:

#2 A picture tells a story

On their Facebook wall people notice posts with photos first and fast, so if you manage to post attractive/cute/funny/romantic/delicious-looking photos, these are more likely to be shared by many of your followers and could earn you more Facebook fans.

Show the freshly baked bread you prepared for breakfast, the breathtaking view of the valley from your terrace, or flowers, fresh veggies or the pretty hide-out spot in your garden. You can vary these with old photos of your inn or the area, photos from when you started the inn or before-after photos of the rooms.

You don't need a lot of copy to go with the photos, it can be one or two well-written sentences or a relevant quotation. The idea here is to capture attention quickly so it will be shared impulsively!



#3 What's new?

Obviously tell your readers if you have a new or newly refurbished room, new service, new item on your breakfast table, or if your cat has kittens -- these make them feel part of your inn's community.

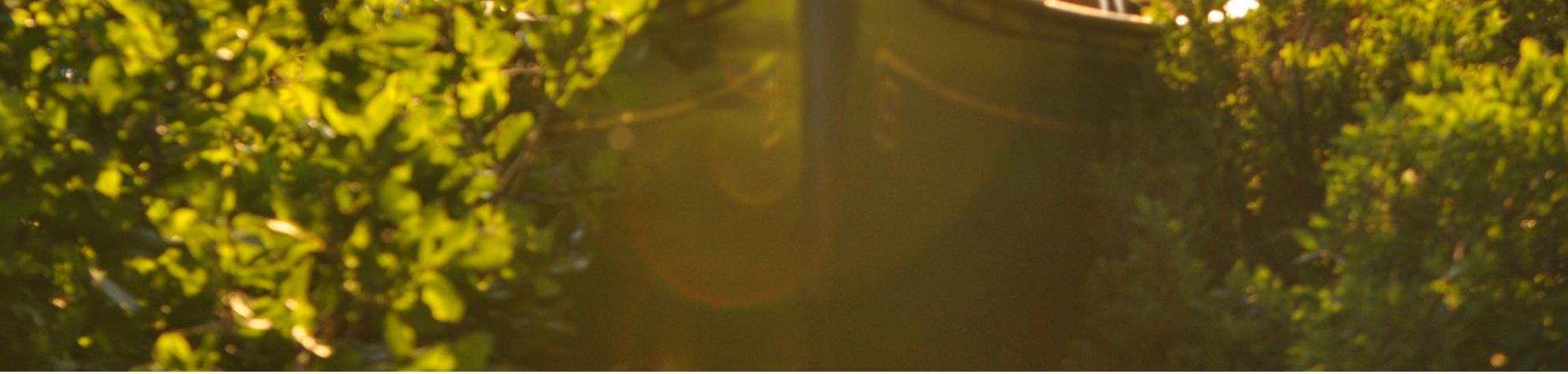
If you maintain a blog, you can alert followers about your latest posts with a nice hook while the news is fresh, or you can sometimes even bring back older posts if there is a related event, like a favorite employee going off to college, a prize-winning recipe or a former guest who makes headlines (for good reasons, of course!)

Share news of upcoming events, festivals, programs, other small businesses in the area with readers, as this will make them want to return or pass along the idea to friends and family. It's also a great way to encourage gift certificate sales.

#4 Feedback from guests

Your biggest asset is the hopefully huge amount of positive feedback from guests sent directly to you via email, written in your guestbooks, posted on your website or on Tripadvisor. Use these on Facebook to show what you do well. Try to select feedback which doesn't simply say "It was great," but those entries which describe the different virtues of your place, like "the best home-made jam I have ever had."

Choose feedback that shows a nice variety of the pluses of your inn. You can also post photos of your guests enjoying their time at your inn, provided you have their permission. If you have an extra-friendly group of guests, snap a group photo at breakfast or on the porch and share it on Facebook by saying something like "the good times never stop here at the Front Street Inn."



#5 Turn a negative into a positive whenever possible.

Despite the travelling public's high expectations, innkeepers are human beings who sometimes make mistakes. Some guests go on holiday to spot these and write about them. It's a smart practice not to argue with a complainer or excessively explain reasons for your actions or policies, as this is often fuel for their gripes.

With some humour and light-heartedness, you can usually turn a trying situation into a positive. If someone made a complaint about your dog barking late at night, post a picture with you and your dog saying "I had a very serious talk with Sammy who has now given his canine promise not to make any noticeable sounds after 10 pm." Or if someone mentions a burned-out lightbulb, post a photo of your 3-year old niece while changing it, and caption it "the Maintenance Department thoroughly examined the case and has expelled the accused bulb." You get the idea, right?

Try to use even the negatives to your advantage and find a way to turn things into a fun and interesting Facebook post. Of course there are complaints and comments you should heed and address, and others you should simply ignore.

#6 Selling your rooms

While it would be a mistake to try to push selling in each post, you can do it now and then cleverly. Make a "Last Chance" post saying you only have one room left, for one lucky guest who gets back to you fast. (It doesn't necessarily have to be your last room overall, it can be your last room with a view, with a fireplace, etc.)

You can inform Facebook followers about seasonal pricing, last-minute cancellations, or discounts valid only for a 24-hour period, or only for bookings that are confirmed on Tuesdays for example (ideally your slowest booking day of the week). Sometimes you can even put out the FULLY BOOKED board on Facebook, but tell them when your first availability is.

It's human nature to want what we cannot have, so sometimes showing that your rooms are "hard to get" could work in your favour with future bookings.

#7 Sweepstakes and games

You have a precious prize most people want: two or three FREE nights at your fabulous inn! You can organize private sweepstakes which increases Facebook fan involvement and can increase your overall number of Facebook fans.

This is permitted only with Facebook applications, so look into it and think of an exciting game related to your area, your inn's history, your breakfast menus. Before Mother's Day you can ask fans to send a picture with their mom, gather votes for the picture and whoever gets the most votes is invited spend a pampering weekend in your inn with their mom.

#8 Involve fans

One of the best things on Facebook is that it is not a one-way conversation. Encourage fans to talk to you and comment on your posts. At the end of some posts ask followers what they think about a photo, a blog post, an upcoming area event.

Ask info-gathering questions like where they are going for their next long weekend, what was their most memorable travel experience etc. For market research purposes you can initiate Facebook polls and see what the most important factors are for your guests when choosing an inn, or you can organize a vote on how to name your new room, your new breakfast dish, your new pet bird, your new rocking chairs.

#9 Charity

If there is a good cause in your area, a nationwide need for support, or a personal charity organisation you'd like to raise money for, you can organize an auction among your fans, where you offer a weekend at your place for a very low price and the highest bidder wins it.

People are happy to get involved in these as they can be part of the charity support AND they might get lucky and win a weekend ... and bring paying friends!

#10 More Fun, More Fans, More Guests

Facebook is not the Academy of Sciences, you don't need to be serious all the time. You can have some short posts, pictures of the first underwater B&B in the world, or the "5 sentences you should never tell your innkeeper."

Be careful to keep these connected to your Inn somehow and not too industry-specific. If you are good at the fun part, this will increase virality, your posts will be shared, it will mean more fans, and at the end of the day: MORE GUESTS. Go ahead, have some fun on Facebook today.