GET IN THE KNOW ABOUT SOMO

Unlock the Visual Storytelling Superpowers of Social Media and Mobile for Hotel Marketers

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About Leonardo
The world of digital marketing is evolving. In spite of all the changes, one thing remains constant – consumers demand compelling visual stories. Both social media and mobile devices have burst on the hotel marketing scene in recent years, and play major roles in the ways consumers research and book travel.

As you read on, you’ll gain practical tips on how to leverage SoMo to tell your hotel’s story and get travel shoppers talking, sharing and booking.

Our contributing author, former hotelier and digital marketing expert Mark Hayward, has provided in-depth insights and examples about making the most of SoMo. Enjoy the eBook and be sure join the discussion on social media using #LeoeBook.

John McAuliffe
President, Leonardo

About Mark Hayward
Mark is a former hotel owner who is passionate about using his “real world” experience to help hotel marketers and tourism businesses use social media to build relationships, manage reputation, and ultimately increase revenue.

Mark has written content for American Express and TripAdvisor, and he’s participated in hospitality industry “marketing best practices” roundtables for brands like Intercontinental Hotel Group (IHG).

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Chapter One

GETTING TO KNOW SOMO
What is SoMo?

When collaborative social media meets on-the-go mobile technology, the result is the powerful SoMo phenomenon. The convergence of these two technologies has given people access to anything and everything they want, whenever they want, wherever they are.

It also has turned people into prolific content producers – a.k.a. SoMo content. SoMo content is generally defined as photos and videos taken on mobile devices – smartphones and tablets – and then shared on social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube, to name a few. There is much (and growing) research that tells us about the critical role SoMo plays in our daily lives as consumers. It is also creating new opportunities for companies and brands to market to and understand their customers. Hotel marketers who embrace SoMo will be able to reach and engage more travel shoppers online, and ultimately, tell a more compelling and comprehensive hotel story.

Here’s a look at how travelers are using social and mobile.

Travelers are Social

Almost 50% of all travelers turn to social media for travel inspiration¹, meaning there is no shortage of travel inspiration to be found. In fact, 42% of stories shared on Facebook are about travel² and 76% of travelers share their experiences on social media.³

Mobile is Here

Not too long ago, mobile was up-and-coming, but now it’s here and it’s here to stay – especially when it comes to travel. Travelers use mobile at all stages of their travel journey - inspiration, planning, researching, booking and while traveling. However, the research and booking stages see the most significant usage. More than 50% of travelers use their smartphone to research trips and approximately 25% of travelers book from mobile phones.⁴
Mobile booking is predicted to continue to rise, with 50% of all bookings to be made via mobile by 2017.\(^5\)

**Social + Mobile = Opportunity**

With social media being so popular for travel inspiration and sharing travel stories, and mobile for research and booking, together, they are a hotel marketing powerhouse. The merging of the two has created opportunities for hoteliers to take advantage of SoMo to tell a better story, and reach millions of travel shoppers.

Successful SoMo for hotel marketers involves leveraging the power of mobile and social together to create and source content, and curate interesting visual stories. Using these tools, your hotel's stories will work to reach, attract and engage online travel shoppers, inspiring them to book.

The **Hotel Galvez** (right) in Galveston, Texas regularly posts photos of its happy guests on its Facebook page to share the experiences they’re having, adding some personality and differentiating themselves from the competition.
Why Social and Mobile are Better Together

Social media, powerful. Mobile devices, even more so. What happens when you leverage them together?

SoMo is a package deal. Perhaps the most obvious reason is the integrated nature of social and mobile. Most smartphones on the market today come pre-loaded with social apps. In fact, one billion smartphones shipped in 2013, all of which were preloaded with social apps like Facebook and Twitter. They also come with built-in high-resolution mobile cameras. Together, they give us the power to capture moments and memories and share them with our social circles instantaneously.

SoMo brings stories to life through visuals. One of the beauties of SoMo is that it enables virtually anyone, anywhere— from your front desk concierge to your chef to your hotel guests— to snap and share photos and videos of where they are, what they’re doing and the people and things they love. As Dan Roam, author of the international bestseller “The Back of the Napkin,” writes “thinking in pictures is our nature, and sharing those pictures has long been our dream.” Thanks to the fast rise of built-in high-resolution mobile cameras and visual-based social networking apps like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter’s Vine, and Pinterest, that dream has become a reality.

SoMo makes digital marketing easier. Today’s marketers have a very powerful visual storytelling tool in their hands (literally) that can be used to create and source content for social media. Doing so keeps the hotel’s story fresh and authentic and communicates it in a casual, interesting and personal way that is better suited to today’s media-savvy, visual-obsessed travelers.

SoMo makes the most of your digital marketing budget. Not every hotel has a big marketing budget and can afford to hire a professional to take new photos every year. While having some professional photos is vital to attracting shoppers, you can also use SoMo techniques (such as using guests’ photos on your website and social media channels) to provide fresh content to travel shoppers, without spending a cent.
The Rise of Somo
Consumers Access Top Social Networks Using Mobile Devices.

- Over 50% of US residents own a smartphone or tablet, and around 50% of those are using the top social media apps available on those devices.
- 100 million users are taking social actions on YouTube every week.
- Mobile users are twice as likely to share content on social networks as desktop users.
- Mobile Pinterest usage increased 60x last year.
- Instagram users have shared more than 20 billion photos to date.
- 30% of consumers have used mobile apps to find hotel deals.
- Facebook fan page posts from mobile devices are 39% more engaging.
- 71% of consumers tweet about their holiday while away.

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80% of all Facebook usage comes from a mobile phone.  

97% of time spent on Twitter is through a mobile app.  

71% of travel searches on YouTube are for destination names.  

55% “liked” Facebook pages specific to a vacation.  

40% of YouTube video plays in the US now come from mobile.  

Mobile users are 66% more likely to retweet.  

2 in 3 use Twitter while on holiday.  

80% of all Facebook usage comes from a mobile phone.  

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Who Uses SoMo?

Social and mobile aren’t just for millennials. Everyone from teens to Boomers, business to leisure travelers are active on social platforms and mobile devices. Regardless of age or demographic, people are creating and consuming content on their mobile devices and on their social media channels. By understanding people’s behaviors – how they use their devices and what they do on social media – you can develop a real understanding of your potential hotel guest, what they want, and target your hotel story specifically to them.

Let’s take a look at a few of these key segments to get a better understanding of how they’re using social media and mobile and help you can use this knowledge to tell a better story online.
Millennials

If there is one demographic that stands out as being most addicted to smartphones and social media, it’s Millennials and rightfully so! Born between 1980 and 2000, they grew up with technology. 80% of Millennials sleep next to their phones and over half said they would rather give up their sense of smell than their technology!

When they travel, they use their smartphones to share their experiences on social media as they unfold. Almost all, or 97 percent, of Millennials post on a social network when traveling and three-quarters of all Millennial travelers post at least once a day while traveling.

This generation of travelers relies heavily on the perspectives of others when making purchase decisions. In fact, 39% of Millennials won’t make hotel booking decisions without authentic guest photos. Tell a complete story using a combination of professional and user-generated content (UGC) to capture their attention.

MARK SAYS

Whether it’s Facebook, Twitter, or other social platform(s), hotels can best use their guests’ photos as part of their comprehensive visual storytelling strategy to assist in building trust, familiarity, and likeability amongst those who are considering a stay - we all feel good when someone shares and likes our photos and content!

As a pointed example, if you receive questions on a daily basis regarding activities that are available at your hotel or destination, ensure that you are sharing guest photos in which they are actively participating in what your destination has to offer.

When posting photos, try to avoid a sales pitch with your accompanying text. For instance, “The Smith family booked with us and you should too,” is only going to make guests feel like they’re being advertised at. Instead, strive to be helpful and sincere. You might include text with a photo similar to the following, “Prior to booking, many guests inquire about our
property’s water park. Here is a photo of the Smith family sharing a special moment and having an amazing time."

Not only will this help to share the visual story of what visitors can do, but will also allow prospective guests to begin to visualize themselves staying with you and will help them get excited about booking a stay.

Generation X

Born between 1965 and 1980, Gen Xers grew up alongside the internet. Nearly all of them are online and the majority use social networks and smartphones\(^\text{32}\) with 95% of Generation Xers using mobile phones.\(^\text{33}\) Nearly half of them view their mobile phone as their “travel companion.”\(^\text{34}\)

Many Gen Xers had their first social media experiences on Facebook. To this day, Facebook remains the most popular social network among this demographic.\(^\text{35}\) Gen Xers are particularly attracted to online video, with 79% of them downloading or streaming video online at least once per month.\(^\text{36}\) When looking to attract Gen X travelers, focus on Facebook and video.

Turn to page 17 for a week’s worth of content ideas to spruce up your visual storytelling on the most popular social network for this generation.

Did You Know?
To this day, Facebook remains the most popular social network among Generation X.\(^\text{36}\)

Who Uses SoMo?

The Hampton Inn & Suites Phoenix Surprise knows many of their guests are visiting their city to attend a game, so they make sure this popular local attraction is part of the hotel story they share on social media.
Boomers

Although the Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) didn’t grow up with the internet, mobile phones and social media, today’s Boomers are more technology-savvy and connected than ever before.

Almost 2 in 5 Boomers own a smartphone or tablet and more are likely to purchase one in the next 12 months. The Boomers that own smartphones and tablets are incredibly active and like Millennials, they move between devices to find information and make purchases.37

The majority of Boomers use social networks daily. More than half follow a group or organization on a social platform38 and 74% of affluent baby boomers use social media for buying decisions.39 Similar to Generation X, Facebook ranks number one as the most used social network among the Boomer generation and they like to watch video online. Facebook is the second most popular video viewing platform among the Boomers, second only to YouTube.40

Creating and posting informative videos about your hotel to social networks using your smartphone is an easy way to target and attract the information-hungry, Facebook-using, video-watching Boomer travelers.

Did You Know?
74% of affluent baby boomers use social media for buying decisions.37

Appeal to the social-media savvy boomer by including rich visuals in your hotel’s story, like B Hotels & Resorts.
Business Travelers

Business travelers are busy and on the go and their smartphones are with them every step of the way. 84% use smartphones for business use during travel. Their top three travel-related activities while traveling are mapping or finding directions, researching local activities and researching destination information.

Busy as they are, business travelers find time for social networking. 60% of business travelers fill their travel time on mobile devices by using social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) to keep in touch with colleagues, friends and family back at home.

SoMo is especially well-suited to business travelers who rely on their smartphones and social media to find information and stay connected while they’re traveling. Content about your local area and dining establishments will appeal to this demographic most.

Leisure Travelers

Social and mobile technologies have become the leisure traveler’s best friend. They use their smartphones to research trips (52%) and book accommodations (25%), but their mobile usage doesn’t end once their reservations have been confirmed. The majority of leisure travelers bring their mobile devices along for the ride.

Sharing self-made videos and photos on social media is a very popular activity among leisure travelers, which makes them a gold mine for sourcing visual content to amplify across your hotel’s social networks. Take compelling photos of what travelers can expect when they visit your hotel for leisure – a day in the sun, your famous spa, or even some great dining to attract leisure travelers.
Chapter Two

HOW TO CREATE, SOURCE AND AMPLIFY SOMO CONTENT
Creating Content

Professional photos and video shoots can be expensive. And until recently, they were the only option for creating compelling and engaging visuals for your hotel. This is no longer the case. Thanks to technology, taking and publishing high-quality photos and videos for your hotel has never been easier.

Today’s mobile devices are as much cameras as they are communication devices. With advanced, built-in cameras, photo editing software and downloadable social media apps, anyone can now create, publish and amplify visually engaging content – all from handheld mobile devices.

Hotel marketers, especially at the property level, will benefit. Let’s take a look at how hoteliers can tap into SoMo to help tell their hotel story with fresh, relevant content that is targeted to their guests.
Your staff has tremendous insight into the daily happenings of your property. As a way to make them part of the process and to encourage them to take and share photos, you might want to come up with a simple editorial calendar that promotes participation. Consider the following:

### Monday
Have the chef or kitchen staff share a photo of a signature dish or the daily special and break down the ingredients in the caption.

### Tuesday
Your check-in staff can capture images of what guests can expect when they arrive for their stay.

### Wednesday
Encourage your concierge to provide photos of insider details about your building or secret eateries in the area that only locals know about.

### Thursday
You might have housekeeping do a visual diary of their day with a new image posted every week.

### Friday
If you are known for nightlife, have your bartender share images of what a typical evening is like. (I’d love to see a hotel bar come up with a signature drink called “The Selfie,” and if guests purchase one, they must take a selfie and share the photo online.)

### Saturday
The weekend is a great time to feature staff photos of special occasions, such as weddings, anniversaries, or birthdays.

### Sunday
Do you offer a brunch? Or do you have another marquee Sunday activity? Encourage the manager (or employees) responsible for the brunch to capture and share the moments with their mobile devices.
In terms of getting guests to share photos of their stay, always remember that social media is a two-way conversation. A simple step to begin the connection process, similar to how you collect email addresses and phone numbers, is to encourage your guests to provide you with their Twitter or Instagram usernames before they arrive. This will allow you to interact and comment on some of their images, or let them know you’re excited they’re coming to stay with you.

At check-in (or anytime, really), if you want them to be more active participants in your visual storytelling process then you most certainly should let them know this. Some hotels like to provide incentives, such as 15% off a meal or a free drink for the best Tweeted or Instagrammed photo of the day.

Another great way to encourage guests to passionately post photos of your property on social media is to create spaces that allow them to share unique moments. For example, the 1888 Hotel in Sydney, Australia developed their whole branding concept around Instagram and they even provide a “selfie space” in the lobby for guests.

While you don’t have to go as far as the 1888 Hotel to be successful, a couple of fun, interactive, and unique ideas can really motivate people to post photos to social media platforms.
Feature Your Staff

Show off your hotel's best asset - the faces that your guests get to know and remember, the people who make their experiences special – in your hotel's story. Featuring a different hotel staff member or department on social media each month using fun and interesting photos and videos that you snap using your smartphone will give you months' worth of content in a matter of minutes.

Loews' launched a digital campaign, called #H2H “Human to Human,” that showcases their employees from all over the world who were encouraged to tweet a picture of themselves with a hand-written sign listing the reasons why they love working at Loews Hotels. Loews saw a major increase in online interactions and engagements as a result – especially on their Twitter account.

It is so easy to pull out your digital camera, tablet or smartphone and snap quick candid shots of your employees around the property, like your events team setting up for a wedding, an attendant placing chocolate on a pillow or your front desk staff greeting a guest.

Answer Your Guests’ Top Questions

Mark Says

One thing I suggest hoteliers do is post answers to their guests’ most frequently asked questions. Here's one example: a hotel frequently gets calls from potential guests asking “Is your hotel pet friendly?” So the front desk attendant uses her smartphone to snap a photo of the next pet that checks in and posts it to social media (with the owner’s permission of course), saying “Bring the whole family, pets included” with a link to the pet policy on the hotel's mobile optimized website and relevant hashtags.
Become A Virtual Concierge

You are the expert on your location and guests look to you for information about local attractions and activities, dining, shopping and the like. Searching social networks to see what conversations are taking place about your city and instances of folks seeking help will give you opportunities to weigh in and share your expertise and suggestions.

As a former hotel owner, I can tell you unequivocally that when travelers are searching various platforms for destination information they are attentive, eager, and readily want to hear the most current and reliable input from you, the “expert.”

In order to have the utmost success when you begin joining online conversations – whether on Twitter, Facebook, or others – always remember,

in the online “connection economy” world, trust is everything! A good mantra to follow is “teach, don’t sell.”

During my time as a hotel owner, my social connection strategy included answering questions and consistently being active on various channels. Unquestionably, we were rewarded with an increase in lodging inquiries and paying customers. Perhaps even better, many arriving guests commented on the fact that, due to our online interaction, they felt like they already “knew” us.

When thinking about your hotel, always keep in the forefront of your mind that when developing relationships and building your reputation, potential guests will become genuinely interested in who you are and what your hotel has to offer.

Reuse Your Content

Once your original content becomes a few months old, you can post it to your social media channels again with a fresh caption to make it more timely and relevant.

Fuel Multiple Channels

Although creating content is so easy using your smartphone, you don’t need to constantly create and publish brand new content every time you want to post on a different social media channel. For example, start by shooting a video using your smartphone camera and post it to YouTube and Facebook in its entirety. Then, take still shots of interesting parts within the video using the screen capture functionality on your smartphone. Post the photos to your hotel’s Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Pinterest pages – or even your hotel website.
One of the great things about SoMo is that there is so much content already out there in the digital world that you can use to your advantage. There is a common term in the marketing world that you’re likely familiar with, User-Generated Content or UGC for short. There’s plenty of it out there on the social mobile web just waiting to be discovered – and once you do, you’ll gain new insight on what people love about your hotel and ideas to help you tell your hotel story.

As a means of increasing your content mining, a particularly useful tool for searching much of the social web is #tagboard. You can simply enter your destination or property name, e.g. Puerto Rico, and then skim through the results.

Another fantastic and extremely user-friendly tool for searching Flickr for shareable (creative commons license) images is Compfight. In the search field enter your destination or hotel, such as: “Boston” and you are presented with thousands of image options.

One final platform that might be of interest as you source content is Shuttlerock, which positions itself with the tagline “Integrate customer content into your website.” The platform is specifically designed to help you curate, filter, and share user generated content.

**MARK SAYS**

_The best way for hotels to ensure that they can find their guests’ UGC related to their property is to encourage them to tag the property in photos, or to include the username if guests are Tweeting the content. This will make it much easier for you to re-share, like, re-tweet, and distribute your guests’ images as part of your visual storytelling efforts._
Benefits of UGC

- Makes your hotel story authentic and unique
- Provides new insight about your hotel story
- Helps travel shoppers to envision themselves at your hotel
- Makes travel shoppers feel comfortable booking
- Supplements hotel created content, giving travel shoppers both perspectives
- Saves you time because it is already created for you!

UGC is Pure Gold

**MARK SAYS**

This photo came through my Twitter stream one morning. It’s a prime example of social, mobile and visual storytelling all in one.

The San Juan Marriott’s child friendly service was so great that it inspired this mom to pull out her smartphone, snap an adorable photo of her little guy with food all over his face, and tweet it out to her followers.

The hotel provided exceptional service; the guest provided a fantastic story worth amplifying. This is pure gold and an example of earned media at its finest. How does this help your hotel reach travelers and increase bookings? Well, like we noted above, adding a personal touch to your hotel’s story on social media – showcasing your staff, guests and the people who make your property unique – helps you stand out from the competition and shows travel shoppers why they can expect a unique, personal experience at your hotel.

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**Lillie Marshall**

@WorldLillie

Oh @SanJuanMarriott -- You give new meaning to "child friendly." Thank you for treating us so well!

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Make Sure You’re Monitoring

Your guests are talking about you – they’ve likely already posted photos or videos of their stay at your hotel using the social apps on their mobile devices. Many social and tech savvy guests probably mention your hotel using your social media handles when posting, just as the guest who posted about the @SanJuanMarriott did. The best way to stay on top of these mentions is by simply modifying your notification settings within your social media accounts to notify you whenever your hotel is mentioned in a post or using a social media monitoring platform.

Once you find these posts, share them! It keeps your social media accounts fresh with original content and lets travel shoppers know you’re paying attention to their experiences. Plus, monitoring your accounts is a good way to respond to guests’ concerns or thank them for compliments!

Give Guests Reasons to Create and Share Content

Travelers love to share their experiences with their social networks, particularly when they’re doing something unique, interesting, or brag-worthy. Here are a few ways to get your guests talking about you on SoMo:

- Provide stellar service experiences that make guests feel valued and appreciated
- Offer guests following you on social media unique experiences like a behind-the-scenes tour of your chef at work
- Run contests that prompt guests to snap and post photos or videos on social media
- Come up with a theme to motivate guests to post content, like a “Fun in the Sun” theme to kick off the summer (don’t forget to start a hashtag)
- Remind your guests at hotel events (who are taking photos anyways) to mention your hotel name and upload those photos to social media channels
Leverage Local Attractions

Another easy way to source content for your SoMo strategy is from local businesses that may be of interest to your guests. Check out the social media feeds for the top restaurants, cafes, shops, activities, event venues and your local tourism board and share the interesting content you find there. Not only is this tip budget-friendly, it’s also a great way to showcase unique events going on near your hotel, providing another reason for travel shoppers to choose you.

Spreading the Reach of Your SoMo Content

We know that SoMo is naturally driven by visuals. We also know that travel shoppers aren’t exclusively using social and mobile to interact with hotels. In fact, travel shoppers visit as many as 38 different sites before booking.45

Absolutely re-tweet, comment, share, like, post and amplify SoMo content created by you and your guests for maximum visibility on social networks, but its usefulness doesn’t stop there. Use your SoMo content to create authentic and compelling curated visual hotel stories on your website, in your marketing campaigns and on third-party travel websites.
Freehand Miami

As a hostel, they have the restraint of a limited budget so they use SoMo content to the max. They encourage guests to take photos and videos during their stay and tag the hostel when they post to social media. The Freehand Miami uses this stream of their guests’ visual content to tell engaging stories on their website as they unfold at the property.

The Standard

The Standard pulls visual content that guests have posted to social media using their mobile devices into their website. This way, travel shoppers visiting their website have the pleasure of seeing professional and guest photos on a single page, painting an authentic picture of the hotel and creating a highly impactful visual story.
Best Practices to Make the Most of SoMo

The power of SoMo will continue to grow in the coming years, as more and more people embrace mobile devices, share experiences on social media channels, and learn about new experiences through a combination of both.

Stay ahead of the game by adapting your hotel strategy to accommodate the rise of SoMo. It’s an easy and affordable way to tell your hotel’s story. Get out your smartphone and get started - you’ll be a SoMo Superstar before you know it!

Which tips are you going to start implementing in your hotel? Collaborate with other hotel marketers and learn more best practices by following the conversation on Twitter #LeoeBook.
Top 10 SoMo Best Practices

Making the most of SoMo can help you tell a better hotel story - and reach more travel shoppers, plus save you time and money by repurposing the content you already have! Follow these ten tips to add SoMo to your hotel digital marketing strategy.

1. Include engaging rich visual media created by you, your staff or your guests in your hotel story
2. Embed links to your social media channels prominently on your website
3. Make both your visual content and the supporting text descriptions “snackable” (short and sweet)
4. Encourage guests to share photos and videos during their stay (see page 24)
5. Actively monitor and engage on social media
6. Make sure your visual content is optimized for mobile (mobile-optimized visuals so travel shoppers don’t need to scroll through images on their mobile phones)
7. Ask questions and include calls to action to boost interaction and exposure
8. Select hashtags that are relevant to your brand and encourage guests to use them
9. Make photos stand out by editing them using filters and enhancers within social apps
10. Reuse and publish content to multiple social networks
About Leonardo

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 Leonardo, visit www.leonardo.com.