

the

**SOCIAL
TRAVEL
SUMMIT**

THINK TANK

'Navigating the Future'

2015



OVERVIEW

The Social Travel Summit (STS) is an exclusive annual 2day gathering of travel & tourism professionals, leading travel bloggers & online influencers from around the world.

Its purpose is to promote and curate high-level discussions about the future of online travel marketing.

The bloggers and influencers are specially selected based on the high quality of the content produced, online reach and track record in working with the tourism industry and the summit provides a unique opportunity for industry professionals to connect with them and build mutually beneficial relationships.

The first Social Travel Summit (120 delegates) was held in Leipzig, Germany in April 2014. The second (100+ delegates) was held in Hamburg, Germany in April 2015.

The Social Travel Summit is an initiative of [iambassador](#) in collaboration with [Reiseblogger Kollektiv](#) and [Traveldudes](#).

THE THINK TANK

A key component of each Social Travel Summit is the Think Tank.

A selection of around 30 delegates representing a balanced mix of industry & bloggers are invited to discuss a range of topics and come up with practical ideas & suggestions for improving the way bloggers/influencers and industry work together.

The topics are discussed in a 2hour session, with each delegate able to consider each topic. The topics (5 in Leipzig 2014, 3 in Hamburg 2015) are overseen by Topic Leaders whose job is to keep the discussion on track, summarise progress for newcomers to the topic, and steer the delegates towards some practical solutions/suggestions.

The 2014 Think Tank Report, including a suggested 'STS Code of Standards & Ethics for Professional Travel Bloggers' (in the appendix) can be found [HERE](#).

The latest (2015) Think Tank discussions, findings and recommendations are presented in this report.

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METHODOLOGY

Based on our Think Tank experience last year, we reduced the number of topics from five to three in order to give delegates a chance to discuss each more thoroughly and in a more focused way.

In the weeks before the summit, we invited all STS delegates to participate in an online survey to gather in advance some ideas and opinions on those topics. These were used to seed the discussions in the Think Tank.

We allocated the three topics to three tables and appointed a Topic Leader to each. We then divided the delegates among the tables trying to get a balanced mix of bloggers, PRs, DMOs and industry. Every 30 minutes the delegates moved to the next table. The Topic Leaders stayed with their table, briefed the incoming delegates, steered the conversation and at the end, summarised the points made.

Each Topic Leader was given a sheet with the topic outline, suggested goals, and some ideas/talking points culled from the survey.

TERMINOLOGY

In this report, some names and abbreviations appear often.

Blogger In the 2014 Think Tank it was recognised that there are a number of roles within the scope of digital and social media storytelling, content creation & journalism, e.g. videographer, Instagrammer, YouTuber, blogger, photographer, live streamer, content creator, etc. Trying to come up with one name to cover all, present & future, was beyond the capability of the Think Tank... and a little pretentious! Delegates agreed that 'blogger' had already become a shorthand generic name in many circles (rather like 'Hoover') and can be taken to mean not just bloggers but all other social & digital media influencers too.

Travel/Tourism Industry everyone, including travel PRs but excluding 'bloggers' & travel media.

DMO 'Destination Marketing Organisation', aka tourism organisation or tourist office. Supranational (e.g. VisitBritain), National, Regional & Local.

P2P & F2P 'Pay to Play' & 'Free to Play'. Slightly tongue in cheek abbreviations for the new & old, commercial & traditional, relationships between industry & bloggers.

AVE & KPI 'Advertising Value Equivalent' & 'Key Performance Indicator' both measurements for assessing & reporting the value of content, campaigns, or editorial. AVE is considered old-fashioned, but many organisations still use it.

TOPIC 1

Structures & People

Do our existing skills, job titles, roles, departments and budgets still work?

Topic Leader: Nicholas Montemaggi

Delegates universally agreed that social media marketing has developed and expanded really quickly in just the last few years, leaving many travel & tourism organisations, travel PRs and travel media wrong-footed and struggling to adapt.

Not only are there fundamental differences between traditional media and bloggers but also traditional marketing & advertising concepts (e.g. above or belowtheline campaigns, native advertising) have got mangled, AND geographic marketing boundaries made almost irrelevant.

Restructuring

It is clear that many travel & tourism organisations are already aware that their existing organisational and budgetary structures are causing problems and some have begun reorganising themselves. One industry observer has given the trend a name the Ripple.

Delegates were aware of several national and regional DMOs that are already making changes to their PR & Marketing departments. One DMO representative said that his organisation was now looking at restructuring and he was aware of another (attending STS) that has firm plans to merge their marketing, press & PR departments into a single Digital Content Department.

"Yes, this is the structure we have in our company now," confirmed a delegate from a travel company, "There's not just the marketing department. There's an expert in 'social'. There's an expert in 'content'. There's an expert in 'digital'. There's an expert in 'PR', and there's someone looking after the 'market' only. And this is just for one country. Each country [in which we operate] has one of these."

Another national DMO delegate confirmed the same: *"At the start of the year, we merged together. Before I was under 'Communications' and I handled blogger relations. So budgets were similar to PR. But then we realised it's not PR. It's really content marketing. So we married together our SEO team, our blog team, our social media team, and now our PR team, into the group and we are creating strategies to really push the content."*

However the 'ripple' is not uniform. Some organisations are resisting change. One blogger suggested that some DMOs are not likely to merge departments any time soon, and a PR confirmed that most of the companies she works with are contracting out their social media communications because they don't have the resources to handle those roles internally: *"One client I have got a PR agency (us) and they've just taken on*

a digital agency to do SEO. They are doing blogger outreach, basically chasing links, and we are handling trips. They have a budget. We have a budget. So we have to collaborate but there are a lot of companies with external agencies who don't collaborate... and bloggers maybe, don't help when they pit one department against another. They call one and then when they don't hear anything quickly move on to another. I often find the departments compete for budgets so that's why they don't collaborate". She suggested that often departments won't tell each other what's going on because they want to claim the pat on the back and justify their budget.

Other delegates agreed that often individuals in different departments tend to be protective of their blogger contacts and don't share them. The issue of siloed budgets and strategies appears not just within organisations but between them too. One blogger joked: *"I'm about to go to Australia but they don't want me to fly into Sydney because it's not in their state!"*

Resistance to change also comes from the top, where views are likely to be more entrenched, particularly in national DMOs where there is government oversight. Civil servants are never keen on change. One regional DMO delegate said his DMO's different departments are trying to get together, but that initiative *"doesn't come from the top of the organisation. It is more from people like us working in the field, who know where the problems and benefits are"*.

Another national DMO delegate confirmed that government can be very traditional when it comes to structures, budgets and targets: *"We have 22 global offices, and they [management] will say to us... 'From Belgium we want to see this AVE (Advertising Value Equivalent)'. It's horrible but government want to see it still."*

PR delegates all agreed that traditional clients, especially government, still want to use the old-fashioned AVE measurement system for reporting on F2P & P2P content despite their best efforts to encourage them to use more useful KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and that, this is something else that will have to change in the Ripple. Delegates thought that the pace of change throughout the industry will inevitably speed up. *"As more organisations change what they are doing [with budgets & departments], senior managers will see that and think 'ok something is going on worldwide',"* said one industry delegate.

One blogger said that he tells organisations to forget bloggers when they think about their business: *"Just think about how content is created and consumed now as opposed to ten years ago? Remove bloggers from the equation and think about your customers. What are they doing? What are their influences and where are they finding them?"* That, he said, tells them all they need to know about the way their business is working, and whether it needs to change.

Social Media Expertise

Delegates discussed whether travel & tourism industry organisations have got people with the right skills in the right jobs and in the right departments.

Not by design it seems. Delegates said that very often social media initiatives came from inspired and inspiring individuals who may happen to be in the marketing department, or the press office, or the external PR Company and take responsibility for it.

Organisations need to recognise and nurture these individuals. It helps, said one industry delegate, that more people are getting into social media: *"When you are just one guy working with bloggers, the management can just think you are a little weird but as more and more people get involved it's harder to dismiss!"*

There are some distinguishable patterns. Delegates talked about where digital expertise was mostly located at national tourist office level, regional or local?

Some thought that in Europe it is often to be found at regional level. One DMO said *"The national tourist office doesn't really know what's going on online, but the locals are quite good and keen to learn so now his and other regional offices are trying to teach them."*

The view from North America was slightly different. The state tourist offices are not as dynamic and advanced as the local CVBs (Convention & Visitor Bureau), at least not as advanced as the urban CVBs, said an American blogger: *"Often the local marketing teams are smaller with smaller budgets, but they are much more in tune with what's going on and more creative."*

PR Companies

Delegates talked about external PR companies and whether their role is threatened by travel & tourism organisations restructuring. Although many organisations may be outsourcing their social marketing communications, others are bringing those functions in-house. Delegates noted that when social media audiences are defined by language not nationality, the need for 'representation' (local PR & marketing companies representing overseas destinations to their local market) could be diminished.

"There's always going to be a need for PR companies," said one blogger. *"Most people don't realise they need PR till something goes wrong,"* she said, *"Example, when there's an oil spill in the Gulf and people are cancelling their holidays to Florida."*

Delegates also agreed that some aspects of traditional PR activity may seem archaic, *"Like sending out press releases that I'm never going to publish"* said one blogger. But there are still many magazinestyle websites that will publish that content including a large traditional media base with significant online influence. *"Getting your story into a national newspaper, online & off, is still a major coup".* Said one PR, *"The problem is the way that free & paidfor content have blurred the lines".* In the early days bloggers started dealing with PRs who treated them like journalists; as a free distribution network. Delegates thought part of the problem lies there. It's not that PRs haven't been quick to adjust to 'unpaid freelancers who needed to be paid', they have. It's that their budgets have not been quick to adjust.

Budgets are crucial. One blogger delegate who used to work in PR said that too often those organisations who contract out PR & digital marketing, split the roles and budgets but they shouldn't. *"When I was working in PR five years ago, all of a sudden we saw the emergence of these new digital teams in PR companies. It was usually around three guys (it was always guys!) and they ran stuff like competitions on Facebook. So why aren't PRs being hired to run F2P and P2P digital, because they do know about digital & social media?"*

One delegate said that in his opinion PR should always come under the marketing department because the overall strategy came from marketing, but it was suggested by others that in many cases that already happen, though maybe not always successfully: *"We come under Marketing"*, said one PR, *"But all that means is, we come up with the clever social media campaigns and they take the credit!"*

Delegates also noted that change always brings with it the possibility of disruption. One blogger warned that PRs need to watch for the new Influencer Marketing Agencies that have been launching in the USA like Tapinfluence and Webfluential. They are automating the distribution of paid content to influencers bloggers, Instagrammers, YouTubers, etc. *"These guys are competing for your budgets,"* she said.

Action Points

Delegates universally agreed that there is a need for tourism organisations and travel companies, who have not yet done so, to start reorganising their departments and job roles to make the most of their marketing & PR efforts in the new online environment, and that 'open office' transparency between departments is crucial for maximising the efficiency of their campaigns. Their five key points are...

Collaboration

Collaboration is the key. If Marketing, Digital, SEO and PR departments & budgets cannot be merged, at least make sure they all collaborate and do so early in the development of projects.

PR

PR individuals and companies have a key role in developing content and should have the necessary budgets to reflect that. Whether merged into a digital content marketing department or not, PRs' scope should not be diminished. They still have an important role to play in traditional media & online communication.

Transparency

Organisations need to transition from a culture of fear to a culture of trust and openness. Brands can no longer control their message. They have to empower everyone in the organisation from the most junior to the CEO to be brand custodians on social media.

Expertise

Companies & DMOs need to find social media & digital content experts wherever they are within their organisation, nurture them, empower them, and use them to 'spread the word'. DMOs need to spread new working practices up the chain to their political/governmental supervisors, and down the chain to their local suppliers and stakeholders.

Measurement

Organisations and individuals still using AVEs for reporting need to be persuaded to start using KPIs across a wide range of parameters to provide a more useful idea of ROI.

TOPIC 2

Money & Budgets

How does a brand's social communication get funded? How its value determined and whose budget does it come from?

Topic Leader: Angelika Schwaff

The Value of Collaboration

The distinction between Marketing and PR has become less clear but as each department works with their own (often limited) budget, it is the question where exactly the modern day blogger fits in and who should be using their budget to fund blogging campaigns.

One PR said: *"Our budget is not big enough to run a campaign, or maybe one and then they do nothing for the rest of the year. We struggle with that."* Another PR agreed and mentions the benefits of sharing budgets with other departments: *"Our big campaigns are focused on sales as we only have small budgets. We need to team up to those who have a bigger budget so we can afford to pay for blog campaigns."*

Topic leader Angelika shared her ideal situation. One that most delegates seemed to agree with: *"My hope would be, maybe in 10 years, for companies to have a mutual department with PR, social media and marketing and a mutual budget."*

The question is though, how is this to be achieved? And is this even realistic or is the solution better found elsewhere?

One PR summarised the current state of most DMO offices: *"I'm noticing with my clients, especially my tourism clients that they are all starting to reevaluate how they are structured. They definitely want to be more integrated but it is a long process. There are people who have been in these jobs for over 15 years and don't necessarily want to change."*

Luckily, two of the attending DMO's did take the step to merge their departments and both found it very successful. One shared: *"We spend about 80% of our marketing budget on digital and just 20% on traditional media which is an anomaly, it's quite forward thinking."* Another DMO added: *"We already have a joined PR & Marketing department and we've found that when you come up with an idea or if a blogger comes with an idea, you can build up on that with both expertise. We are now nominated for a campaign that we did with a blogger last year. It definitely opened the eyes of our CEO."*

A PR shared her concern in merging departments: *"There should be a whole switch in thinking though amongst those digital marketeers because they won't know how to put an itinerary together and work out what you need*

for a campaign. For example, they need to be skilled in both sides of things or need to work more closely with the PR's at the same time."

Besides merging departments, DMO's could also consider other often overlooked ways to add to their budgets.

Two bloggers who also do PR work have personally had experienced with this: *"Are you aware of the huge potential that in the EU lies in education, qualification schemes and especially regional development funds? There are millions in Europe and they are actively looking for certified people to spend it with. That is a huge potential. For example, high schools often work together with DMO's and people are getting hired just for these types of projects. It's a different approach for DMO's looking for extra money and worth looking into."*

The Value of Tracking

When it comes to the allocation of budgets, the issue of monitoring and measuring the results of campaigns was deemed very important by the delegates, but how? Everybody wants a better way to judge Return on Investment (ROI) but some people in the industry have been suggesting that blogger views, reach & engagement statistics are valueless and even hardcore traditionalists recognise the deficiencies of Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE).

So, is a new system for measuring ROI essential? Can there be a robust and commonly accepted way to measure effectiveness that doesn't rely purely on direct sales?

One DMO gave an insight in the way budgets are allocated in most cases: *"Our funding come from the government, so you have to account for every single penny. If they tell us 'you are going to report to us in AVE', that's what we have to report in."*

But there is a fine line between what is expected and what is desired. As one industry delegate put it: *"I don't want to track that one sale that this one campaign brought [because], a blogger also brings to the table a dedicated audience that loves to hear about what they are up to, where they are travelling to and how they are doing this."*

There seems to be a forward moving trend in collecting and presenting more data to dig a little bit deeper, as one DMO described: *"We stopped using AVE a year ago and are now educating our PR agencies that we don't want it anymore. We want to look at the messages that we think our consumers need and our bloggers want to get out and how we actually get that out by measuring those messages instead."*

One PR also reported that they measure the 'on message' value of posts: *"We are bringing in more and more measures, one of them being the sentiment of our message. How much of the content out there got through the messaging that we wanted? And how much of the content is talking about themes that we want people to be talking about?"*

A PR who regularly educates DMO's summed up the importance of measuring value in addition to cost: *"Some kind of AVE needs to be reported but we need to go deeper so that when you present the results it is just one of the data that you presented. We have to talk more about the value of digital marketing, the stuff that money cannot buy such as the content, reach and the brand ambassadors globally that work for your brand, it's not just about that one blog trip."*

The Value of Investment

In the tourism industry, simply looking at direct sales isn't enough. One blogger explains: *"In fashion or food you can put a product on a website with an affiliate link and sell 40 dresses. However, when people make the trip of a lifetime, they spend far more than those 40 dresses combined but often that sale is not linked back to the blogger's efforts. People see an expensive product, think about it and then book directly with a company. Travel blogs are not direct sales channels. If you measure success only based on how many people go on my site to go to yours, you are missing context."*

One of the bloggers experienced this first hand: *"We were one of those people who sold an entire departure for a tour company but even with the company's sophisticated tracking systems. They never captured the fact that all those people were on that tour because of an article we have written. It was just one of the people on the tour who happened to tell a story and only then did they find out."*

Are companies spending too much on traditional media marketing such as Billboards, magazine ads, etc.? Should they be diverting more resources to social media? Why? If ROI is an issue with bloggers, why wasn't this the case for print media where there were no numbers at all?

Moderator Angelika explained her problem with traditional media marketing and the fact that bloggers are often not paid for their work: *"I know companies that still pay for an ad in trade magazines for 12.000+ Euro. Nobody knows who is reading this. Of course you have the media data from the publisher but there is much less specific data than what you would get from a blog. Bloggers know exactly how many minutes their audience spend on the blog, a specific article and what they click on. On top of that, it is not as if bloggers are like freelance writers who go somewhere hoping to then sell the story to five different newspapers. We already do the work, as the content goes onto the blog."*

Angelika explained further: *"When a journalist goes on a press trip with PR they won't get paid by them but will still get money for an advertorial through Marketing."* A blogger adds: *"So in the end, the journalist got paid as part of a deal (not always, but in general that's how it works) and that is not happening with bloggers. I just want to get paid for my job. And the industry should want it too because if I can't make a living, I can't give the exposure to the readers you want to reach." ..."and my site might be gone in two years."* added another blogger.

The Value of Content

Does the industry really understand the value that bloggers are bringing? Is there a knowledge gap or could it be that this whole new trend of blogger marketing is just too overwhelming for most companies? How can it be made more acceptable for professional bloggers to get paid for their work?

"We're a handful of professionals and we are still an amateur industry", said one blogger. "Many companies are getting inundated with 20 million bloggers wanting to visit their destination. So why does a PR person want to pay a professional blogger when they've got more bloggers wanting to just travel the world for free?" remarked one blogger.

Perhaps the problem lies with PR itself, said another blogger: *"As long as PR gets paid to get free advertising, what they are going to do is keeping the status quo. And that is why people currently aren't paying bloggers. If you keep bringing in teams of Bbloggers, you'll get exactly the same thing. Bring in one Ateam blogger and they'll see the difference."*

A PR saw the influx of bloggers as an opportunity to create campaigns: *"I don't believe that you should just be paid for going to a destination and have a day rate. It needs to be something bigger than what brands would just get from a press trip normally. It needs to be a proper campaign that works within the marketing structure."* However, another PR mentioned another pitfall here: *"In my experience, PR are still too focused on press trips. They don't have the mindset to design a campaign."*

Another point raised was: *"As a DMO, for us one of the main issues is choosing who to work with. It could be a PR, digital marketing agency or blogging collective but how do we know if we're being brought A or Bbloggers? How can we trust the agencies?"* A blogger shares advice: *"You need to go with people with a track record, and you need to do a bit of research on your own."*

Even working with a PR isn't always going to deliver you the best people for the job, Angelika says: *"In the German blogging collective, I get emails about twice a week from PR's asking me if a specific blogger is good enough. And they claim themselves to be blogger relation experts."*

Lastly, it was noted during the discussion that even when a partnership between a destination or brand and a blogger is established, the desired results are not always achieved. This is due to a couple of factors: *"During campaigns, some brands or destinations don't tweet the content from the bloggers, it's such a waste."* said one blogger. She got immediate backup: *"Yes, we also just did a campaign, produced video and all sorts of content from it but the tourist board has barely tweeted it. Not even the video."*

It could be again that the destination or brand isn't informed enough on the value of the content that the bloggers can create but it could also be a matter of organisation in the company. A PR said: *"In our case, every Twitter and Facebook account is managed by me or my colleagues in my countries. With every blogger campaign, I'm alerting these guys. It's good for the blogger in reaching another or bigger audience, and for the company in getting new content"*.

Unfortunately, not every company is reaping all the benefits that could be taken from a collaboration with bloggers. Often, this has to do with a short-term approach.

The Value of Relationships

The difference between a campaign and a press trip is something that according to all attendees needs to be looked at more carefully by destinations. In fact, some delegates agreed that the one-off press trips to a region or a country should be banned all together: *"I'm going back to Germany every year. It's a long-term relationship and because of that you create true affinity. And I love it! It's organic. It's relationship over time. Destinations need to take another look at their industry book and basic PR because PR is all about relationship building."*

Another blogger has noticed: *"The problem at the moment with destination marketing in general is that it's very practical and short-term in its approach. It's all about: you've got this amount of budget, this is all we can do. But if you're working on building relationships with bloggers, you need to have a long-term strategy. There is a lack of vision at the top in destination marketing."*

Another blogger added to this: *"I think that some of the value of working with a blogger comes in what's included in the package. When I work with a company, it's not just tweets and live coverage they are getting, but media as well. They might get 20 photos of the destination, for example, that would cost them 3 times as much from a professional photographer. And even 24 years later they can still use these photos on social media and tag me. So they still leverage my audience but I don't mind because I had a paid relationship with them. I retweet their stuff even if it's not mine because I am excited, I feel I'm in a relationship with them."*

A third blogger concluded: *"It's not just the investment in the blogger through a day rate, it's also the relationship and being able to call them three years from now... in crisis management for example."*

Action Points

The delegates came up with 5 crucial steps that both travel & tourism organisations as well as bloggers need to take, for them to make P2P (Pay to Play) social media marketing work:

Education

There is a lot of work to be done to educate DMO's in terms of the future of destination marketing and their collaboration with bloggers. Usually the PR's go to the blogging conferences but there should be people from other departments with access to different budgets to be there as well. It will open their eyes and let the top people understand who to work with.

DMO should also do their own research better: have a look at what other DMO's are doing, establish a network where you can share and see what other campaigns are out there, investigate which bloggers have worked with which brands already, read the stories of bloggers, look at their engagement online. Don't work in isolation!

Long-term Approach

When a relationship between a blogger and a brand or destination is cherished, the benefits will be higher in terms of tracking and adjusting what works in a campaign; The content that can be produced and used by both parties as well as the development of unique collaborations. Trust comes in a long-term relationship and not from figures.

Trust

To make sure the message the blogger is sending out is natural and fits the tone & 'voice' of their blog, they need to be trusted and free to express themselves. If the message is controlled, it's not going to be effective. And again, trust comes only through a long-term relationship.

Bloggers need to show that in their segment they have a dedicated audience that resembles the audience, the company wants to talk to.

Value

While companies should start looking more at the value of their collaborations with bloggers instead of costs alone, bloggers themselves should also be thinking of how they can add value to both their own audience as well as the partners they choose to work with. Bloggers need to take more initiative themselves in coming up with a creative concept to promote a destination, as this will be what sets them apart and is probably what's going to get them the job and the budget.

Insight

Bloggers need to have a better understanding of who exactly their audience is, so that when approaching someone for a collaboration, they can show what truly speaks to their audience and how that can be incorporated into the campaign. They should also be able to show comparable results such as stats, examples of similar campaigns, other case studies that can be shown to the decision makers in the company they want to work with.



TOPIC 3

Knowledge & Understanding

How can we most efficiently develop, formalise, promote, and teach best working practises? Do we need to?

Topic Leader: Hjörtur Smárason

Blogger Education

Delegates agreed that, while many new bloggers participate in blogger conferences, too many have a patchy understanding of the way the travel & tourism industry works. One PR confirmed: *"I'm getting bloggers asking for FAM trips... with money. They don't understand there's a difference between a FAM trip and a [marketing] campaign."*

Delegates acknowledged that other bloggers do 'get' marketing and some have an understanding of 'strategy' too but they are few and far between.

Delegates also recognised that while many (not all) bloggers, new to the industry, may be able to write well using good grammar & punctuation they don't necessarily have basic journalism skills. It's not unusual for example to hear of bloggers who don't know how to plan a post so that it meets the requirements (word count, subjects to be mentioned) of a brief/commission, aren't aware of the dangers of libel/slander, nor of the new attention and potential legislation being applied to online marketing, reviews and sponsorship by government departments and agencies in Europe & North America.

One American blogger said she sometimes work with big brands on large campaigns and they will watch the content she produces very carefully. *"Their legal team will go over my copy and make suggestions about how it can be made safer or improved, and they will remind me to make a declaration in my social media posts because it's in their interests. It's not the bloggers' risk. It's the company's risk. If we (bloggers) don't comply with FTC (Federal Trade Commission) guidelines, the FTC is not going to come after us. They'll go after the company... at \$10,000 a pop! But we still need to educate ourselves."*

Industry Education

Delegates talked about some of the more old-fashioned ideas they encounter and why they exist. The primary reason, as one well-known problogger explained, is that the old and new media models are assumed especially by older industry figures to be similar just variations of the same thing. Whereas they are completely different.

The differences are even larger with probloggers. *"I am not a blogger!"* said one blogger (sic), *"I am a businessman!"* Too many travel organisations think of bloggers as amateur and hobbyist or junior journalists, he said. *"But this is a business that I earn my living from that happens to be a blog."*

One DMO delegate agreed. *"We have to completely destroy this idea that you can compare a journalist with a blogger".* She said that her team are often asked by her boss to present trips & content from 'bloggers' as being done by 'journalists' because *"it looks better on paper. That's what the director can put his signature on!"*

Delegates agreed that the old-fashioned attitudes like that were most prevalent at the managerial and boardroom level of travel/tourism organisations.

Delegates discussed the fear that many in the industry have, of letting go of 'the message'.

Companies and marketers have been used to setting the 'message' in paid media, and PRs have been used to coaxing and massaging editorial into line with the 'message' in earned media. Social media has undermined that way of working and the 'message' is now in the hands of customers, influencers, and anyone who cares to post.

Delegates thought that travel & tourism organisations not already embracing the transparency of social media need to be encouraged to let go. *"The Internet recognises b*llsh*t faster than anything else, and that's why organisations work with probloggers who walk the line between advertorial and editorial,"* said one blogger.

Getting corporations to 'let go' of their control over the message is possible said a delegate from a major city tourism organisation: *"In 2007 we created a PR & content department with digital communication built in from the start. We tried to move away from a culture of 'fear' to a culture of 'creativity' and it started right down from the most junior team member. We had 85 staff in the organisation. We ran all of the visitor centres, and when Twitter started and with Facebook, we said 'it's ok to use them' this was back in the days when staff were not allowed to go on Facebook. But we made very clear rules and guidelines about how to use it, how you can engage with it, how you can be a brand custodian because visitors want to know they can trust you and what you tell them."* The key to making that change in corporate culture is having somebody at the top who understands social media, she said, and then empowering everyone in the organisation to use it.

Bloggers felt that the industry also needs to better understand what bloggers can and cannot do and how they can work better together.

For example, the education gap is not all about underestimating what bloggers can do. One blogger said that quite often industry & PRs know or have been told that bloggers & digital storytellers are the 'new thing' and think that by merely using them, sales will automatically shoot through the roof! We need to 'manage expectations' he said.

Another blogger referred back to one of the problems highlighted in last year's Think Tank no follow up. All too often brands commission individual bloggers or collectives for a campaign but don't do anything with the resulting engagement. Last year the STS delegates were talking about the sales funnel and how bloggers play a role engaging brand awareness and product interest at the top of the funnel but didn't have an

interface with the next sales layer to pass those 'leads' on. Typically there was no agreement, arrangement, or mechanic (e.g. competition) in place, for the brand to make use of the leads generated.

"We are not a newspaper," said one blogger. "We are usually just a one-man show. We have the reach of a newspaper but not the manpower. There need to be more teamwork between us and the company to make the most of our work." Other bloggers agreed. "I am a small business not a journalist," said one blogger. "Nine to nine [o'clock] FAM trips don't work for me. My business is run from the road. I need 3 hours working time every night. "That's where we come in," said another blogger, "because we can hold their hand. When they say they have a nine to nine schedule, we say 'No! If you want social media activity, build in the time for it'. And they are learning."

Education Gap

So, how to tackle the 'education gap'...

Several delegates thought that in the PR sector which might be considered to have less formal relationships, younger PRs need to take ownership of social media and make it their mission to educate their seniors.

Delegates considered there were two important tools to use...

- ☑ Case studies Bloggers and industry delegates in all three discussion rounds on this thread, agreed that the provision of as many case studies as possible of blogger campaigns and their impact is crucial for changing minds at the top of travel & tourism organisations.

Bloggers need to ensure they have case study materials for all their work and to make them freely available for other bloggers to create. *"If I'm asking a 5star hotel to host a blogger as part of a campaign," said one DMO, "it's not enough to back the request up with a general case study that I have for a past campaign. The hotel will want to see a case study from that blogger."*

- ☑ Speakers a number of bloggers talked about the impact of small speaking engagements had. For example one blogger talked about being invited to spend a day with a Scandinavian city DMO and what a difference it made when he explained how he worked and what kind of creative marketing campaigns he worked on.

Another talked about a small group of digital storytellers being invited to talk to a regional DMO and their stakeholders: *"The stakeholders were saying 'we didn't realise you would be so businesslike!'".*

One destination marketer said that she includes education in the price to her clients. She organises an annual large scale blog trip and includes a mini conference/workshops to educate the stakeholders and partners on how to work with bloggers.

Delegates agreed that travel industry and social media/blogger conferences are critical platforms for training both bloggers and the industry. Bloggers and DMOs should always consider the opportunity for

bolting a short (one day) event with workshops, speakers, and/or Q&A expert panels for their stakeholders on to any large blog trip.

There are problems though. Not enough travel & tourism organisations attend and from those that do attend, not enough staff or stakeholders attend. We, as an industry, should be cross-pollinating ideas by inviting conference organisers and key speakers to each other's events. One marketer pointed out that Marketing Agencies, PRs, & DMOs all have events and conferences for their own sectors, and increasingly have a 'digital/social media' track that travel bloggers should be speaking in.

Two bloggers from a major problogger collective talked about their annual reader survey. All their bloggers invite their readers to complete a survey about where they went on holiday, what they did, how much money they spend and on what. The collective shares the results with DMOs. A travel PR said she knew of several DMOs and brands who also conduct their own surveys on consumer behavior and spend but they don't have the same direct access and engagement as bloggers.

There was a general agreement that an annual consumer/reader survey would be an excellent initiative with bloggers and industry collaborating over the form and range of the survey questions and all bloggers being encouraged to invite their readers to participate.

Some thought that organisations like STS or PTBA (Professional Travel Bloggers Association) could be the central organiser and annual collation body for such a survey.

Action Points

The delegates came up with recommendations for improving expertise and understanding among travel professionals and bloggers:

Case studies

Bloggers and industry experts need to demonstrate tangible results to the rest of the travel & tourism industry. "*Case studies, case studies and more case studies!*" as one PR put it.

Social Media Events

An increasing number of DMO staff, PR companies and travel/tourism companies are participating in the main blogger conferences and events held around the world but it is only increasing slowly. All too often the same companies/faces appear. Delegates agreed that we all need to encourage everyone from industry leaders to individual small business operators to attend conferences like TBEX and workshop events like NBE (Nordic Bloggers Experience) in order to learn what bloggers can do, engage with them and find out how to work with them.

Delegates also agreed that more crossfertilisation is needed between social media events with the travel sector making more use of speakers and panelists from other industry sectors.

Bloggers and DMOs should always seize opportunities to train their stakeholders in short seminars, workshops and networking events.

Blogger Skills

There are plenty of opportunities in conferences, workshops and through blogger, writer, and photographer associations to learn new skills but bloggers wishing to make a career from their travels need to learn from established probloggers, the business skills required and from traditional journalists, the old skills that still apply.

Report Summary

In last year's STS Think Tank, delegates focused in on a number of issues and bottlenecks that directly affected the way they work and sought ways to tackle them.

This year, delegates, particularly blogger delegates sounded more like observers rather than participants.

It is clear to all, there are changes afoot ("the ripple") throughout the travel and tourism industry as organisations reorganise departments and budgets to meet the changing demands of social media marketing (& customer relations). STS delegates are largely stood on the sidewalk waiting for the rest of the industry to catch up.

Nevertheless, there were a number of practical suggestions for ways in which bloggers and industry delegates in the vanguard of the 'ripple' can encourage and maybe accelerate those changes.

- ☑ Keep highlighting the need for change and draw attention to those organisations who have already changed their structures, budgets, and working culture. Herd mentality dictates that the pace of change will rapidly accelerate when there's a critical mass. If organisations, even those with entrenched attitudes see others changing around them, they will take change more seriously.
- ☑ Produce and make available case studies for every digital/social media campaign you run. Case studies change minds.
- ☑ Encourage travel & tourism industry professionals to attend as many conferences and workshops on social travel marketing as possible.

Where PR, marketing and digital departments have not yet merged, early collaboration on new social media marketing initiatives is essential independently run campaigns are inefficient.

And there were a couple of interesting new standalone suggestions...

1. In Money & Budgets; that industry organisation should look for available grant funding to support marketing & education initiatives
2. In Knowledge & Understanding; That an annual global blogger audience survey would help to support the case for social media & digital content marketing campaigns.

THINK TANK IMPROVEMENTS

Each year provides a chance to improve the process and there have been significant changes to the Think Tank methodology while keeping the things that work. This year has highlighted two new areas to look at.

Venue

This year again highlighted the need for topics (tables) to be physically separated. Delegates found it hard to concentrate on their discussion with other groups in such close proximity and commented on it several times. If we have three topics again next year, we really want to put them in three separate rooms.

Number of Topics

The reduced number of topics (3 from 5 last year) works well but as anticipated, there was still a large amount of overlap. It has been suggested that perhaps there should be just one topic discussed by one large (30 people) group in two 45minute sessions (+ 10min break, + 5min break, + 15min summary session). This is something we might try in 2016.

We would like to thank the following:

- ✦ **Alastair McKenzie** - our Think Tank Moderator who once again did a brilliant job in hosting and guiding the Think Tank session with great enthusiasm. We would also like to thank Alastair for his excellent insights and for creating this report.
- ✦ **Nienke Krook** - assisted with the Think Tank itself and wrote a large portion of the final report. Her assistance was invaluable.

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plans online campaigns and keeps the website updated. In Germany the Visit Norway-office is located in Hamburg. Visit: www.innovasjon Norge.no/en/start-page



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CLOSING WORDS

The Social Travel Summit is a milestone in the rapid evolution of travel blogging. Fueled by a passion for travel and sharing, many travel bloggers are increasingly seen as professionals who offer tremendous value.

Our objective was to take this level of professionalism up a few notches and establish a solid foundation for collaboration between the bloggers and the industry, and we wanted to do this in a casual environment that fosters relationship-building.

In this sense, with ample networking opportunities, music and dance, and quizzes, the Summit created a fun, positive atmosphere that resonated with the delegates. New at STS 2015 were dedicated sessions for both industry and bloggers in which both parties could share their experiences and expertise, and discuss the impact of digital marketing in an open, trusted environment.

The Summit would not have been possible without the support of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) and Hamburg Tourismus. Petra Hedorfer, Chief Executive Officer of the GNTB: *"The Social Travel Summit provides a professional international platform for representatives from the tourism industry and social media influencers, particularly bloggers and instagrammers, to engage in lively debate. Our current promotional campaign is a case in point. When developing the Traditions and Customs concept, we made sure there were ways for bloggers and instagrammers to contribute. The campaign was the focus of our presentation at the STS and also provided the theme for the inaugural Instagram tour, which ran in parallel to the event. Within the last few days, on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the hashtag #joingermantradition has generated a total of 738 posts, a reach of 4.2 million and 24.6 million impressions."*

Dietrich von Albedyll, managing director of Hamburg Tourismus GmbH, spoke on behalf of Hamburg: *"As the host city for the Social Travel Summit, we have endeavoured to further improve our online expertise and collaborate more with international travel bloggers. In particular, the Instagram Walks in our supporting programme were very well received and are now creating a lot of buzz. The international delegates took 400 pictures during the STS in Hamburg and these are now being shared around the world as user-generated content."*

- ☑ Read what delegates said about STS Hamburg: www.thesocialtravelsummit.com/delegates-feedback-sts-hamburg/
- ☑ Watch the STS Hamburg video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRt39AZ9A4c

I would like to thank all bloggers, industry participants, speakers and sponsors for making STS Hamburg so special and I look forward to welcoming you at STS 2016! Look out for our announcements on:

www.TheSocialTravelSummit.com

