



Tourism Survey Results 2019: Social Media and Digital Destination Marketing

Which social media and digital marketing platforms are working well for tourism professionals and partners like you, and which are not? What are some online marketing priorities for smaller DMOs? How can I keep my tourism marketing skills sharp and up-to-date?

This is our second industry survey on social media in tourism marketing, slightly changed to take a broader look at digital destination marketing overall. We share the voices, the successes, and yes, the frustrations of CVBs, DMOs, and tourism partners, including those "marketing teams of one."

Our purpose is to give you a quick **snapshot of where you stand among your peers**, help you see how you and your organization fit into the mix with the respondents, and show you that you're not alone in dealing with some common challenges.

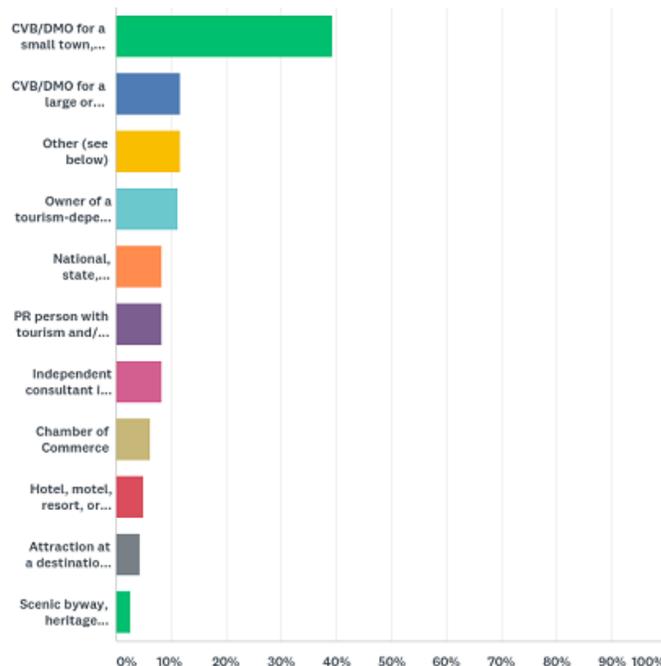
- There were 178 survey respondents worldwide, drawn mostly from our [our email newsletter](#) list although others participated when we announced the survey on our various [Tourism Currents social media channels](#).

[Here is the link to the results of our last survey](#) on social media in tourism, data gathered in late 2013 and published in early 2014.... yes, we plan to run this survey more frequently in the future!

Let's look at the details....

Who Are You?

Q1 What sort of organization do you work for? (select all that apply)



Nearly 40% of survey respondents work for a CVB or DMO for a small town, county, or a region, which is about the same as our 2014 survey.

We think this **gives the overall results a unique perspective – they are somewhat weighted toward that of the smaller DMO.**

The second largest groups, about 12% each, either....

- Work for a CVB or DMO in a large or medium-sized city, or
- Are the owner of a tourism-dependent business, or
- Are some sort of "Other" such as a Main Street/downtown development professional, or an educator (tourism curriculum Professor.)

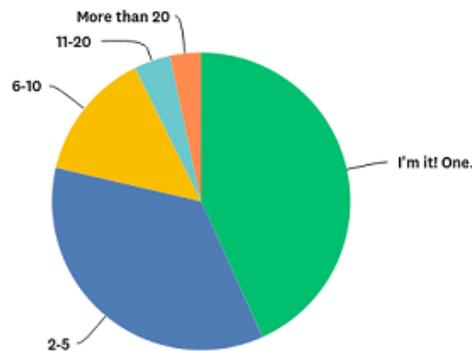
The third largest group of respondents, at exactly 8.43% each, either

- Work for a national, state, provincial, or territorial tourism office, or
- Are a PR person with tourism and/or hospitality clients, or
- Are an independent consultant in the tourism or hospitality industry

The remainder of respondents include people at Chambers of Commerce, hotels and lodging, tourism attractions, or a scenic byway, heritage highway, or trail advocacy organization.

How Many Are on Your Marketing Team?

Q2 How many people are on your organization's marketing team? (select one)



If you feel that you're all alone juggling multiple demands as a "Team of One," you are not.

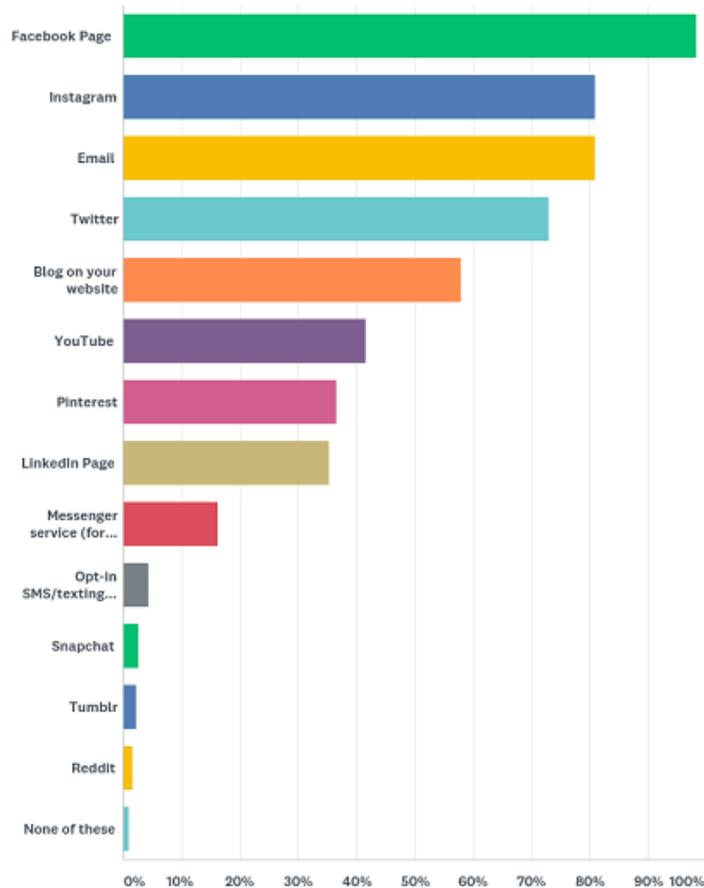
Somewhat to our surprise (this was a new question this year) 43% of our survey respondents are the only ones doing the marketing for their organization.

Another 35% are on small teams of just two to five people.

While time and resource management are a challenge, no doubt, **there are advantages to working alone or on a small team**: fewer layers of bureaucracy to navigate, ability to experiment more freely, and to respond more quickly to change.

What You're Doing Right Now in Social & Digital

Q3 Which social media or digital marketing tools are your organization ACTIVELY using right now? (select all that apply)



When we published answers to these questions **in early 2014, the answer was mostly Facebook and Twitter**. This year we expanded the selection options to include other digital marketing tools like email.

Top tools/platforms in active use by respondents:

- Facebook Page – 98% have one, up from 95% in 2014
- Email and Instagram – tied at 81%. Email was a new option; IG was previously at 38%
- Twitter – 73%, down from 79%
- Blog on website – 58%, up from 46%

- YouTube channel – 42%, down from 46%
- Pinterest – 37%, down from 47%
- LinkedIn Page – 35%, up from 28%

The remainder of tools/platforms in active use include messenger apps like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, an opt-in SMS/texting service, Snapchat, and Tumblr. A few DMOs are experimenting with website chatbots, VR (Virtual Reality,) and podcasting/audio content.

Instagram is now solidly the #2 social platform in use, behind Facebook.

In our view, Twitter is morphing into a visitor services channel and a way to connect with travel media, YouTube is rather overlooked as a tremendous SEO asset (not necessarily a social channel,) and we're surprised by the drop in Pinterest usage since it's become a powerful travel inspiration search engine and it drives website traffic.

Note that **more respondents have a Facebook Page than an email list**, which we find a bit frustrating. Remember that all YOU control is your own website, blog, email list, and opt-in SMS/texting list. Everything else is "decorating a room in someone else's hotel" as [Marcy Massura](#) says.

Then we asked an open-ended question....

The Destination Marketer's Wish List

What would people try if money were no object and infinite time was available?

In early 2014, it was getting more out of Facebook (including more advertising,) doing more with YouTube, and ramping up blogging.

Here is a word cloud of the 2019 responses:

Q4 If you had unlimited time and money (yay!) what is the ONE social media platform you'd like to try, because you're confident that it would be successful with your market?

Snapchat advertising think Blog website LinkedIn need Blog sure platform
Unsure Pinterest Email YouTube better
Instagram one Facebook posts video using time
now tube N Twitter website

No surprise: in an increasingly visual world, tourism pros know that **they need to invest resources into visual platforms** like Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube, plus create more visual content for Facebook.

Some specific wishes in these comments from respondents:

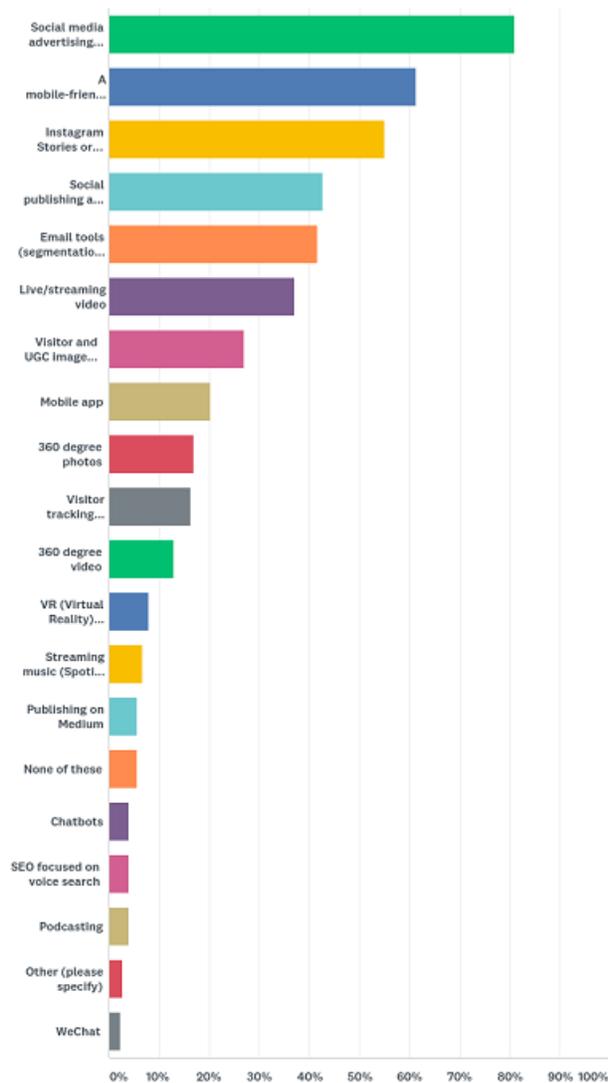
- * "Videos - website, YouTube, enhance [our] Facebook & Instagram posts."
- * "My own dedicated website, managed by someone who could keep it in top ten rankings."
- * "Pinterest! Our team had an active Pinterest presence at one point, but right now I have been unable to tap into it. Our community is unbelievably picturesque, and Pinterest content has such long staying power. It would be great to get back into it."
- * "Geo-targeted opt-in messaging and high-quality produced vids for YouTube."
- * "We just yesterday made a LinkedIn Page and are hoping to engage with meeting planners."
- * "Guest blogging program, local authors."
- * "We don't advertise as much on Instagram as I'd like."
- * "Twitter. I dabble in it now, but it could be so much better if I had the time to scroll it, retweet, get involved in chats, etc."
- * "I would like to have more time to do more with the platforms I'm [already] using."

Other wish list items included more/better email segmentation, podcasting, hiring influencers, website chatbots, opt-in texting, and media monitoring.

To find out what people have tried in the last 12 months in the real world (without unlimited money or time) we then asked:

Which Digital Destination Marketing Trends or Tools Has Your Organization Tried in the Last 12 Months?

Q5 Which digital destination marketing trends or tools below has your organization tried in the last 12 months? (select all that apply)



This was a new question, so we don't have comparative data from 2014.

Top responses in order:

1. Social media advertising (for example, Facebook or LinkedIn Sponsored Posts) – 81%
2. A mobile-friendly, responsive website – 61%
3. Instagram Stories or Facebook Stories – 55%
4. Social publishing and brand monitoring dashboards (Sprout Social, Hootsuite, etc.) – 43%
5. Email tools (segmentation, personalization, automated campaigns like a welcome sequence) – 42%
6. Live/streaming video – 37%
7. Visitor and UGC image sharing (for example, Crowdriff) – 27%
8. Mobile app – 20%
9. 360 degree photos – 17%
10. Visitor tracking services (for example, Arrivalist or Adara) – 16%

The remainder included items like 360 video, streaming music like Spotify or Pandora, WeChat, podcasting, and voice search SEO.

6% of respondents said, "None of these," which we suppose means that they are not experimenting at all.

Something to think about: **the top two items were social advertising and a responsive website.** Those have been basic, must-have/must-do items for a few years, yet **many organizations are still working to get their arms around them.**

This matches what we see out there on the road, especially with tourism partners – they are not nearly up to speed with modern digital marketing as the savvier DMOs practice it. There is plenty of ongoing learning to do.

We then asked another open-ended question....

What Is NOT Going Well for Your Organization in Social Media & Digital Destination Marketing?

Here is our summary of responses from 2014:

"Some specified Twitter and Facebook (especially being forced into more pay-to-play on Facebook,) but overall the consensus is that there's not enough time for social media, not enough resources (bodies and dollars), social media activity keeps getting stuck in office silos/is not coordinated, and there's not enough engagement on social platforms given the effort expended."

Here is the word cloud of results from 2019:

Q6 In 2-3 sentences, what is NOT going well for your organization in social media and digital destination marketing?



"Not enough time" and "not enough resources" are still ongoing challenges for many, as is dropping organic engagement and the need to spend money on social advertising to get better visibility.

Several respondents are confident and happy right where they are, with comments like, "I would not say there is anything that is not going well for us."

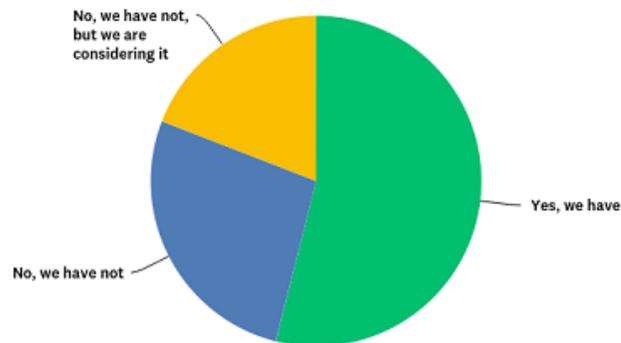
Some other thoughts from respondents:

- * "As the sole communications specialist, I am responsible for all of our marketing: events, governmental announcements, etc. Our community has experienced exceptional growth in the past decade, and I would love to have more time (like 48 hours a day) to dedicate to my job. Another team member would be a huge step for us."
 - * "Planning content and using an editorial calendar. Never once in all my cities with all the different hats have I been able to accomplish this."
 - * "I think we need to be more consistent with our email marketing and building our email list. We get email leads and I don't think we use those to the best that we can."
 - * "We don't really do anything but Facebook. We should do more, but I also do Economic Development, so never enough time for everything. Is there a way to be more efficient?"
 - * "It's difficult trying to figure out what the small towns we help have in place in the way of social media, as many of them have quite elderly folks in volunteer only positions in tourism/chamber etc."
 - * "We don't have a comprehensive, all-encompassing social media plan or calendar. We don't always or are not able to align our multiple platforms (i.e. print with social with billboards, etc.)"
 - * "We are trying to teach more out of state and international travelers. Budget has been a real problem."
 - * "We're re-strategizing on all our digital platforms. We see a time not too long from now when Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are not as universal as they are now."
 - * "We are a very small team, so we don't have a lot of time for analytics and interpreting them intelligently. If we had more time and capacity, we could better use our analytics to make more informed marketing decisions."
- One person simply said, "I have no idea what is not going well or is going well."

Working with Influencers

This was a new survey question. Over half of respondents (54%) have worked with influencers, and another 19% are considering it.

Q7 Has your organization worked on digital marketing campaigns or collaborative projects with bloggers, influencers, or brand ambassadors? (select one)



Of those who said they had worked with influencers:

- 56% ran **both paid and unpaid** campaigns/contracts
- 21% did not pay their influencers
- 12% paid them

The remainder made other arrangements, like comped hotel stays, attraction tickets, and gift cards to restaurants.

Of those who said they had worked with influencers, **we asked if they would do it again.**

The majority said yes, they would, and here are a few of their reasons why:

- * "If the influencer has a high level of engagement with their followers, we see good results in our projects."
- * "Overall it's been positive. We have been able to reach a variety of audiences we could not have otherwise reached, for fairly minimal costs."
- * "It helps gain exposure to our small town. We have a lot of bloggers in bigger cities around us, so it lets people who live in those cities know how close we are and what we have to offer."
- * "We see great ROI and our community partners love the additional exposure as well."
- * "Especially niche influencers because they have a very targeted, loyal audience."

* "For our small organization, this garners not only social proof, but also evergreen content (which we are always time-challenged to be able to generate). Great bang for the buck for us."

A few respondents said that **they are getting pickier** about who they select – "Numbers [of followers] aren't enough to impress us" – or are still enthusiastic, but are adjusting their approach toward cultivating more local ambassadors, and away from mass press trips with a single agenda:

* "We would rather have it be a more organic experience, rather than direct them to a specific tourism asset. We think having an independent third party with their own following provides a valuable sense of authenticity and improves our reputation among audiences that we may not necessarily be targeting in some of our other marketing."

* "We need a way to vet them efficiently. Now, we just look at their blog/website/social media and guess."

A few are not impressed:

* "TBD. ROI has been hard to demonstrate."

* "We're not sold on their ability to 'sell' our product well and it's no different than having a travel writer doing the same thing."

How Do You Prefer to Get Your Professional Development & Learning & Keep Up with All the Changes?

Constant changes require constant professional development, and a **commitment to lifelong learning** and skill set upgrades.

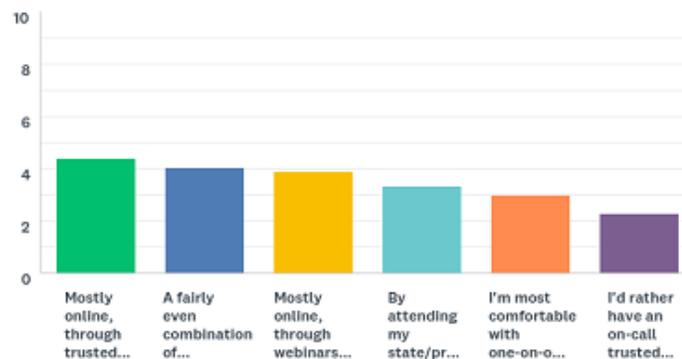
When we asked in 2014 how people preferred to learn and keep their skills sharp, the most preferred method (by a hair) was a combination of in-person workshops and online lessons, closely followed by self-paced online learning.

We adjusted the question somewhat to allow more options, and this year, the most preferred method is to:

- Learn mostly online, through trusted source blog posts, videos, and email newsletters (31%) followed by

- A fairly even combination of in-person workshops and online resources (24%) then
- Mostly online, through webinars and online courses (16%) then
- By attending my state/province/regional industry annual or semi-annual conferences (13%)

Q10 How do you mostly prefer to learn and stay current with best practices and trends in social media and digital destination marketing? (1 is your strongest preference, 6 is what you least prefer)



The remainder are most comfortable with one-on-one, in-person learning or small group workshops, or having an on-call trusted paid consultant who can help just when needed.

We're happy to see **how comfortable people are with online learning** - especially since we run an [online course in social media for tourism](#) - but it makes sense that online assets shine in a just-in-time world of "when I need to know something, I'll Google and start learning about it."

There is still plenty of room for great marketing education at in-person tourism conferences, but if that's the only time that people devote energy to learning, they will fall behind.

When we asked survey respondents to rank what matters most to them in professional education, they said, in order:

- **Quality** of the educators and their material, including how comprehensive and up-to-date they are, was most important (33% - down from 42% in 2014) then

- **Relevance** to my particular organization's marketing work (32% - down from 35% in 2014) then
- **Price** (18%, the same as 2014) then
- **Time** commitment and flexibility for my schedule (15% - up from 6% in 2014) then
- **Ease of access to instructors** for questions/guidance (3% - up from 0% in 2014)

In summary, we were happy and honored that so many smaller DMOs, tourism partners, and "team of one" marketing pros took the time to tell us what was on their minds, in addition to respondents from larger organizations ... plus those six people who said they were on marketing teams of more than 20 (!!)

Clearly the challenges of managing priorities, keeping up with near-constant change, and maintaining focus on what matters continue to keep the tourism industry on its toes.

The answer is continuous learning, and frequently asking those basic but crucial digital destination marketing questions, "Who is my market, where are they spending their time online, and how can I most effectively connect with them where they are?"

Teams from 1 to more than 20 all struggle with time management and fast-paced change. **Stay focused** on your strategy and goals, don't chase too many shiny objects, and make the most of the inexpensive and powerful tools we have today.