

INTERNET

The cold coffee tweet that changed Four Seasons' approach to social media

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Four Seasons NY Tweets

By JOE MCCARTHY

NEW YORK - Although a single tweet did not suddenly cause the Four Seasons to jump on social platforms, the cold coffee anecdote is emblematic of the consumer behavior shift that occurred several years ago and has had a cascading effect ever since, according to an executive at Luxury Interactive 2014 on Oct. 15.

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The travel sector traffics in experiences, which are ephemeral and prone to subjective, sometimes hastily conceived, interpretations that force properties to be active on social media to address complaints when they arise. In addition to fixing frustrations, social media also acts as a vehicle for hospitality brands to showcase the people making the experience possible.

"At any point during a stay we can make their experience really memorable or something can happen that can make it really awful," said Elizabeth Pizzinato senior vice president, marketing and communications, [Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts](#), Toronto.

"Even when something does go wrong, we make it right very quickly," she said. "There's a human element to it, the human moment that brings [the brand] to life for people."

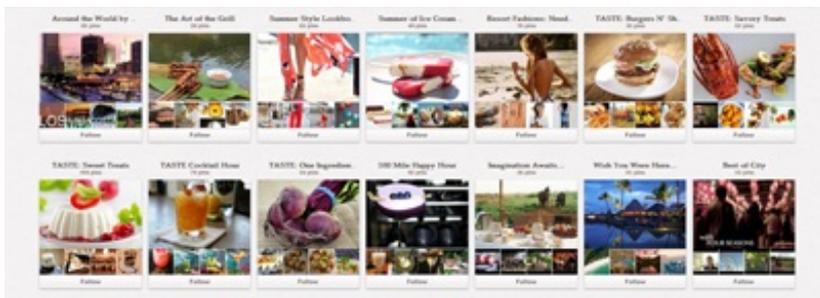
Responsive presence

During the "Micro stories: How bite sized content creates engaged consumers and builds brand equity" session, Ms. Pizzinato shared that a guest tweeted about a cold cup of coffee around 2008, while sitting in a hotel lobby and presumably grumpy.

Traditionally, guests approached a member of the hotel staff with a problem that could be readily fixed, instead of amplifying it to a large social audience with the potential for virality.

While the tweet was innocuous, it served as a symbolic wake-up call for the brand, signaling that guests were changing how they interacted and had no problem airing a complaint to social followers. As everyone in the travel space knows, online reviews wherever posted are critical to brand equity.

Since then, Four Seasons has embraced a highly engaged and adventurous presence on social media, exploring more platforms than most luxury brands.



An example of Four Seasons' Pin Pack Go initiative on Pinterest

A Four Seasons executive at the Luxury Interactive 2013 conference said that the hotel chain generates around 3,400 pieces of original content per week across 393 social media and related channels.

The speaker also said that customer and guest activity defines how much time and resources the brand dedicates to each channel. The localized expertise of each property allows the brand to produce an enormous variety of content ([see story](#)).

The localized component is key, according to Ms. Pizzinato. Four Seasons sees no purpose in being on every social platform and has no problem pulling back from a platform that it has dedicated itself to if the results are just not there.



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From a Four Seasons Hong Kong Instagram contest

The guest determines how the brand treats social media, and properties have flexibility to shape their own social strategy.

However, the brand provides properties with a social media content hub where they can access best practices, read case studies and learn about the brand's history and mission that can then be woven into posts.



Elizabeth Pizzinato at Luxury Interactive 2014

Four Seasons is primarily focused on staying abreast of consumer-generated content and deploying "micro stories" that humanize the brand.

"How do we take all our great stories, those human moments, and translate them to the

digital age?" Ms. Pizzinato said.

Lighting the fire

A major part of any social media strategy is creating the circumstances that generate compelling real-time content. In other words, brands should create fun events that guests want to share.

Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts is driving down the East Coast through Nov. 11 to treat consumers to food from its top chefs.

The food served on the truck will vary at each destination to reflect the different styles of each culinary team. This concept effectively promotes the brand's culinary roots and will likely earn many consumers along its journey who will now see the chain as an ideal place to stop for a bite to eat ([see story](#)).

Also, any strong digital strategy begins with the Web site.

"When you're thinking about your content ecosystem, start with your Web site," Ms. Pizzinato said. "Make sure things are interconnected."

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

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