

INTERNET

Luxury hotels look to bloggers for measure of authenticity

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Luxury hotel brands are tapping top travel and lifestyle bloggers with increasing regularity to kickstart social campaigns, illuminate what can be found at certain properties and to build connections with highly concentrated audiences.

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Although hotel brands are fully capable of explaining the assets of a property to consumers, travelers are often wary of taking advice directly from the company that stands to benefit from giving that advice. Consequently, leveraging bloggers can help brands achieve a tone of authenticity that may resonate with consumers, while reaching larger pockets of consumers.

"There's a large gray area these days when looking at writers and bloggers," said Damon M. Banks, director of **DMB Public Relations**, New York. "There are a number of writers who maintain some level of a blog as a way to further explore their areas of interest, while also writing for a number of magazines and online outlets.

"There are a handful of these expert bloggers out there who can be very beneficial to hotels as they can provide a look at the hotel to their audience," he said. "In these cases, most hotel representatives know the bloggers who can bring them some level of promotion, and can focus on collaborating with these few individuals.

"These bloggers who have a social media following can provide insight into the property while they visit, as well as an overview at the end of the site visit."

Grassroots

Bloggers generally build their audience from the ground-up, accumulating followers as the quality and volume of content increases.

Unlike hotel brands, or any brand for that matter, bloggers are unable to rely on the cachet of their name to amass large social media followings, which lends a note of authenticity to what they are doing as they have to work hard and prove their worth to gain devoted fans.



Photo from A Merry Mishap

Additionally, long-term followers of bloggers tend to respect the opinions that are posted. Therefore, if a blogger endorses a specific hotel brand, that plug will reach a collection of prospective consumers who will likely accept, and may even act upon, the merits of that claim.

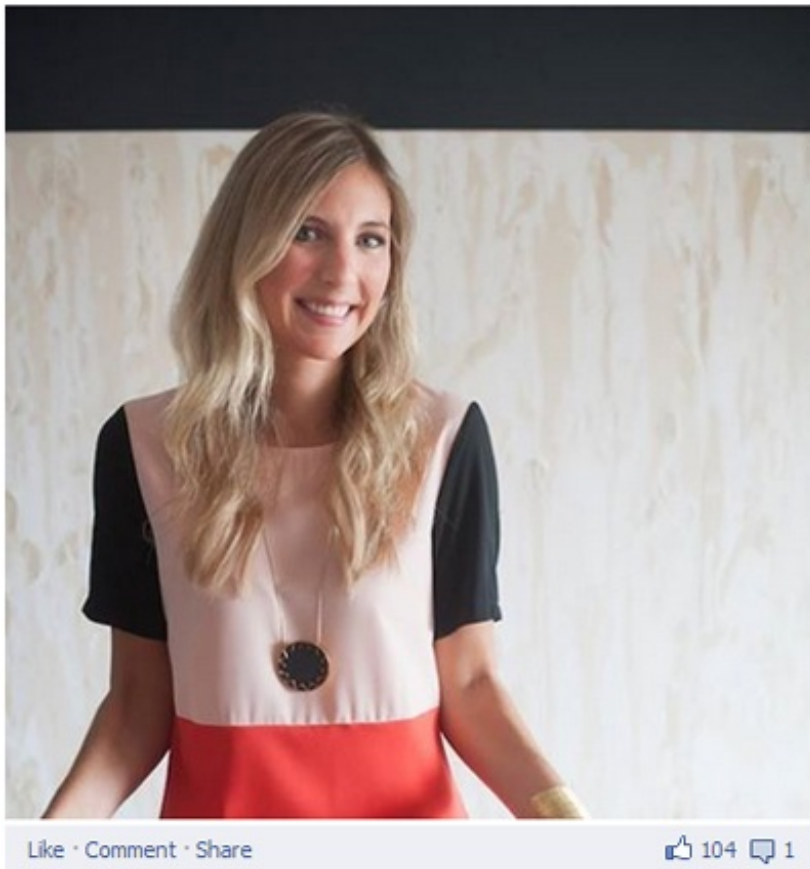
Conversely, an endorsement for a brand's campaign made by the brand itself inevitably holds less weight in the minds of consumers.

Some hotel chains are more attuned to this logic than others.

For instance, Starwood's Luxury Collection stoked the anticipation generated by its West Coast road trip with One Kings Lane by recruiting two celebrated bloggers to chart the trip's course in advance.

To promote the sales-studded road trip, Luxury Collection asked bloggers Meg Biram and Morrison Curtis to join Andrea Fazzari, vice president of merchandising for One Kings Lane, to capture the textures of the journey ([see story](#)).

Please say hello to MegBiram.com our second blogger who will be joining us next week on our roadtrip with [One Kings Lane](#). Meg's a travel junkie with a penchant for the finer things in life. We love her style and design eye and are excited to have her as our partner [#LCroadtrip](#)



Luxury Collection Facebook page

Another Starwood brand, St. Regis Hotels & Resorts, leveraged the voices of four popular bloggers and enacted an Instagram campaign that ran until Nov. 20 to animate its Family Traditions initiative.

The bloggers began their journey with a post outlining how they prepare for a trip and family peculiarities that must be taken into account.

U.S. design blogger A Merry Mishap discusses that this trip marks the first time she has traveled a long distance with her son, while Pinterest phenom Oh Joy emphasizes that packing light is essential for all trips.



Oh Joy photo

As their journeys progressed, fans followed along on St. Regis' Instagram page or through the individual blogs. Ultimately, the blogging component of the campaign will likely cajole each blogger's dedicated fan-base, giving St. Regis contact with many new consumers (*see story*).

Not just travel

Brands from diverse categories recognize that cataloging experiences and offering commentary should be outsourced to more impartial individuals.

Some collaborations entail bloggers charging a new campaign with her or his aesthetic.

Italian fashion house Ermenegildo Zegna tapped street style blogger Scott Schuman of The Sartorialist for its latest photo shoot to reach the fashion-savvy followers of the tastemaker who may have been previously unaware of the menswear brand.



Photo taken by Mr. Schuman of The Sartorialist for Zegna

Mr. Schuman took inspiration for Mr. Pilati's concept for Zegna's Spring 2014 ad

campaign, “éminences grises,” which focuses on men in powerful behind-the-scenes positions. His photographs play on shadows. One model poses next to his own shadow, and another stands next to a fence, with the slats creating shadows on his face.

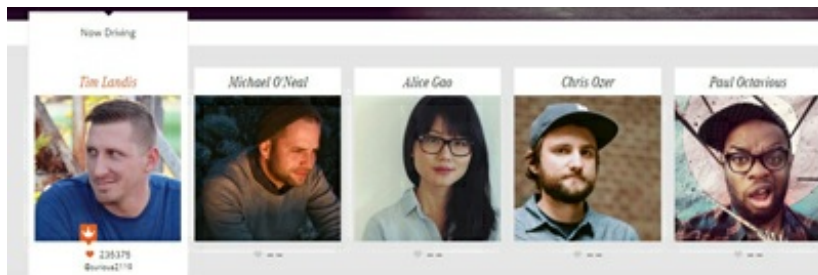
Mr. Schuman also posted the campaign photos to his blog in a post in which he endorses the brand. The blogger professed how impressed he was when he first photographed the collection in June ([see story](#)).

Other collaborations simply ask for an early-stage turbo boost.

Also, to attract new audiences to the Pinterest side of its latest campaign, Swarovski has enlisted Katie Rodgers, fashion illustrator at Paper Fashion, and Caitlin Cawley of Color Me Caitie to host a one-hour holiday pin party ([see story](#)).

Yet another form that collaborations take is when brands entrust individuals with the entirety of a campaign's content.

Mercedes-Benz USA invited five of Instagram’s most lauded users to ignite interest in the CLA model among young consumers by touring the United States in the vehicle. For five days the contestants had creative license to capture the spirit of their CLA-empowered journey ([see story](#)).



Take the Wheel contestants

However, brands should find new partners to collaborate with for each campaign, since a long-term collaboration may end up corroding a blogger's credibility.

"In the case of writers and bloggers, having an occasional invite to a hotel is part of the business," Mr. Banks said.

"Professional writers and bloggers will give the property an honest assessment, and provide some quality feedback to the property in many cases," he said. "Often, bloggers and writers have their normal hotels in each destination so having a hotel invite him or her to their property entices them to try a new property, whereas without some level of incentive to visit, they will often stay at the hotels they know and regularly visit.

"Like anything in this business, it's a matter of respecting the system and not abusing these opportunities while maintaining honest reviews and feedback."

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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