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# Tourism business advice: Time to catch up with social medi

9:58 PM, May. 12, 2011 | Comments



Jeremy Williams discusses various platforms for blogging during "Think Inside the Box," a boot camp to help business owners improve their marketing efforts, Thursday in Lafayette. / By John Terhune/Journal & Courier

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When Indiana's tourism department joined Facebook in 2007, the social media site had 50 million users.

Today, nearly 600 million users -- one in every 10 people around the world -- are signed up.

Ways to use Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor, blogging and a host of other interactive sources to boost business were touted before 50 people in Lafayette on Thursday by Jeremy Williams, interactive marketing manager with the Indiana Office of Tourism Development.

"A Facebook page is what you want if you reach out to people," Williams said. "Twitter users are the most influential online customers. Their influence spreads."

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The Lafayette-West Lafayette Convention & Visitors Bureau sponsored the seminar on social media as part of National Tourism Week. It attracted people in the lodging, restaurant, retail and other industries.

"I know it's overwhelming," said Amanda Gordon, sports marketing and communications manager with the visitors bureau. "But if you start with one piece, one thing at a time, you can do it."

Williams said blogging and QR codes -- two-dimensional bar codes that can be read by smartphones and allow a person to instantly learn more about a business or attraction -- are gaining in popularity with the state's tourism efforts.

"Search engines love (blogging) frequency and recent content. It's easily updated with up-to-date information," he said. "We've started embedding QR codes on our print ads. QR codes need to send people to a mobile-ready site."

Rick Black, owner of Wildcat Creek Winery in Lafayette, attended the seminar and said Williams' presentation was beneficial to him and his business.

"My son is going through this right now and putting together a more complex website for us, and it will include what he talked about," Black said. "So this was pretty interesting for me."

Jim Dietz, director of sports tourism for the city of Columbus, also spoke at the free seminar held at the Art Museum of Greater Lafayette.

He said Columbus will host 64 sports tourism events this year, including swim meets, bike races, 5K runs and other activities, which will create an economic impact of \$12 million for the community in southern Indiana.

"It's been a huge success story -- sport tourism. This can be done in any community. We call it visionary collaboration," Dietz said. "We rarely say we can't do something. It's the way we do things in Columbus."

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