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The Impact of Technology on Winter Sport Tourism

Spotlight: Powder Matt, Social media maven



Matt Mosteller

When you think of ski resort personnel, you imagine them skiing into work each day, sitting at their desks in ski gear and zooming off for a powder rather than power lunch. This is not the case, though, for many corporate staff who work for the bigger ski areas. They are often based in major cities like Calgary or Denver, as far away from the action as most of their regional visitors. As Senior Vice President, Marketing, Sales & Resort Experience, for Resorts of the Canadian Rockies, Matt Mosteller – aka Powder Matt – is one of these corporate commuters. “Most of us working here at RCR Calgary office work in a building that was originally a music store,” Mosteller says. “Now the only music that is played is the sound-track from the various Dylan Siggers and Kalum Ko videos that are sharing loads of powder skiing and snowboarding eye candy.”

Don't feel too sorry for powder lover and ski blogger, Mosteller though – his is a roving position and he gets plenty of time to plough the pow in the six resorts – Nakiska, Fernie, Kimberley, Kicking Horse, Stoneham and Mont Sainte Anne – under the RCR umbrella. To keep fit while at his Calgary desk, he bikes even in winter and sometimes skis to work.

Powder Matt's love affair with skiing started at the age of four when he vowed to enjoy and share the incredible attributes of winter sports throughout his life. These attributes include everything, he says, from "the special bond, to the benefits of spending time outdoors, to the thrill of floating through fluffy weightless and effortless powder on a bluebird day in the Canadian Rockies."

After graduating from the University of Washington in English with a marketing focus, Mosteller majored in ski bumming throughout the mountains of Washington, Idaho, Colorado, Montana and his favorite destination, British Columbia. It was this ski resort internship that refined his philosophy on finding the perfect work/play mix: "Being a ski bum taught me many lessons in life – respect and treat everyone with kindness as you never know when you might need a place to stay or a meal," he says. Lesson two was laugh lots and maintain a positive attitude in all relationships. "Also, build trust into everything you do – heck even ski bums can work at banks and you can't if you make a mistake. Go ahead and give it a try – life is built on learning," he adds. But, most of all, his mantra is to stay healthy, get outdoors as often as possible and experience nature. All these facets are intrinsic to a positive brand, he concludes.

He worked his way up the ski management ladder, starting first as ski school director at Whitefish, Montana in 1991, moving on to manager of guest experience and then relocating to Kimberley, BC, Canada to work as VP Marketing in the real estate division of RCR from 1998-2001.

These days he channels his love of the outdoors, humor, positivity and enthusiasm for skiing in his prolific use of social media. "Everything is social now – the critical aspect is being authentic, be creative, and share, share, share," he explains. He warns against the possibility of over-promising and under-delivering, though, and is insistent on listening to and learning from guest experiences. "One of the key changes is the ability to really scan and aggregate the social intelligence and understand more about your brand's klout, the behaviors of your guests and their interests," he says. With RCR Mosteller uses Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr to disperse information and garner valuable feedback. And, as Powder Matt, he blogs regularly year round on mountain conditions, events, activities and fitness, linking with a veritable menu of social media including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, email, Reddit, Wordpress, Pinterest, Tumblr and StumbleUpon.

Mosteller says that social media is no longer just a simple update on snow reports or sharing web cam images. It has taken on the secondary role of guest relations. "It provides the critical immediate voice of customer which is so important to delivering service excellence," he explains. "As the guest depends on real time updates to decide on where they are skiing, that day, next week or for their annual vacation, it plays a critical role in your communication plan and social media must be integrated into your marketing plan to really turn up the dial on effectiveness – depth, breadth and reach with the market."

In order for social media to be consumed in a meaningful way, it has to be accurate, fun and, above all, an authentic voice. "We started one of the earliest blogs, PowderMatt.com, and it has really taken off both as a communication tool, so your more core guests have a place to get those nuggets of updates on summer capital work, or new trails etc., but also the vacation guests enjoy hearing the real grit and inspiration of real mountain town goings-on," Mosteller explains.

Mosteller's positive philosophy extends to rival resorts which he sees as industry partners, who work together to grow the sport, rather than competition. The real challenges lie, he thinks, in global factors which are beyond the everyday remit of ski resort staff: "Airline capacity, exchange rates, and global unrest and how much things out of your control can have an effect on tourism," he explains.

Mosteller's job has included hosting the Hollywood cast of the blockbuster movie *Inception* at Nakiska Ski Resort where he skied with Leonardo DiCaprio's crew. But he says *all* the wonderful people he gets to ski with are famous to him. For the future he recommends maintaining skiing's original authenticity but at the same time leveraging the energy and innovation of the new people within the industry. Snowboarding has been a dynamic game changer, he says, stimulating ski companies to refine their products and positioning. "Now we see all mountain, freeski, big mountain, and ski touring all on a growth trend," he adds.

Multi-tasking Mosteller is also a ski columnist for Canadian publications, an author - *Adventurer's Guide to Living a Happy Life* - and an outdoor adventurer: "In January 2011 my wife and I competed in what some say is the world's toughest winter adventure race, 'The Yukon Challenge' - over 1600 miles from Whitehorse to Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, with 10 events including snowshoeing, dog-sledding, running and climbing."

Sources: Interview with Matt Mosteller, November 2014; <http://powdermatt.com/>; https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=88957432&trk=nav_responsive_tab_profile; www.skircr.com/

The impact of technology on marketing communications

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We are witnessing a rapidly changing communications environment dominated by digital technology. To illustrate how quickly technology is advancing, take the example of Steven Spielberg's sci-fi thriller *Minority Report*. In 1999, the director convened a three-day think tank to gather insights from 23 top futurists for the making of the movie, which depicted the world of 2054. The goal was to create a realistic view of a plausible future 50 years ahead. Projecting out from the present day's marketing and media technologies, Spielberg depicted an advertising-saturated society where billboards call out to passers-by on a first-name basis, cereal boxes broadcast animated commercials, newspapers deliver news instantly over a broadband wireless network, holographic hosts greet customers by name at retail stores, and where biometric retina scans deduct the cost of goods instantly from bank accounts (Mathieson, 2002). The technologies portrayed in the film were far from science fiction, and today many are in use or are in development - an indication of the rapid pace of technological change.

Technology and the Internet have fundamentally altered the way the world interacts and communicates. Traditional approaches to branding that put emphasis on mass media techniques are less and less effective in a marketplace where customers have access to massive amounts of information about brands, product

and companies and in which social networks have, in some cases, supplanted brand networks (Keller, 2009). In the new media environment, consumers are increasingly in control. Not only do they have more choices of media to use, they also have a choice about whether and how they want to receive commercial content. In response marketers are employing more varied marketing communications techniques than ever before – see the Powder Matt Snapshot above for examples. Table 1 summarizes some of the interactive marketing communication options that are now available.

Website	Companies must design websites that express their purpose, vision, products and history. A key challenge is to design a site that is attractive enough on first viewing and continue to raise people's interest to repeat visit. Dedicated websites for mobile devices are on the increase.
Mobile Marketing	Mobile marketing will become increasingly important. Particularly, smartphone use is growing amongst travelers.
Social Media	Companies are embracing social media because of its potential for collaboration and engagement with consumers. Social media advertising will yield relatively stronger results due to its ability to tightly target audiences based on social media activity.
Display Ads	Display ads are small, rectangular boxes with text and perhaps a picture that companies pay to place on certain websites. The larger the reader, the more the placement costs.
Internet-Specific Ads and Videos	With user-generated content sites (i.e. YouTube, Google Video, MySpace Video), consumers and marketers can upload ads and videos to be shared virally by millions of people.
E-mail	Email uses only a fraction of the cost of a 'd-mail', or direct mail campaign. Three times more effective in prompting purchases than social media.
Blogs	Blogs are commonly maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, description of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Most blogs with high quality are interactive, which allows visitors to leave comments and even message each other.
Microsites	A microsite is a limited area on the web managed and paid for by an external advertiser. A microsite is an Internet web design term referring to an individual web page or a small cluster (around 1 to 7) of pages which are meant to function as a discrete entity within an existing website or to complement an offline activity.
Search Ads	Paid-search or pay-per-click ads, represent 40% of all on-line ads. 35% of all searches are reportedly for products or services. The search terms serve as a proxy for the consumer's consumption interests and trigger relevant links to product or service offerings alongside search results from Google, MSN and Yahoo! Advertisers pay only if people click on the links.
Virtual Reality	Destination marketing using virtual reality is gathering momentum.
Online brand Communities	Many firms sponsor on-line communities whose members communicate via postings, chat discussions and instant messaging about special interest related to the firm's products and brands.

Table 8.1: Digital marketing communications options (Source: Adapted from Keller, 2009, p. 147)