

The Tweet Elite



How The Nation's Top Travel Marketers Are Using Twitter

July 27, 2009

Introduction

The study's objective is simple: learn how destination marketing organizations are leveraging Twitter to reach potential visitors. With the growth of the social networking site and its ability to deliver real-time information to thousands of people instantly, Twitter is a service that individuals and businesses in many industries are embracing. Convention and Visitors Bureaus welcome the ability to speak directly to their audiences. Estimates put the number of CVBs on Twitter at over 300.

Others have conducted studies on Convention and Visitor Bureaus' Twitter presence. Notably, at www.goseetell.com, a monthly ranking of CVB twitter accounts is presented. The ranking gives each group a Twitter Grader grade and shows the number of followers, number of followings and number of updates.

With this study, we hope to provide a more in-depth look at how Convention and Visitors Bureaus use Twitter and a detailed snapshot into the types of interactions that are occurring between these groups and their customers. What are they saying in 140 characters or less?

We also sought to identify "The Tweet Elite" – the nation's top destination marketing organizations using Twitter.

Findings

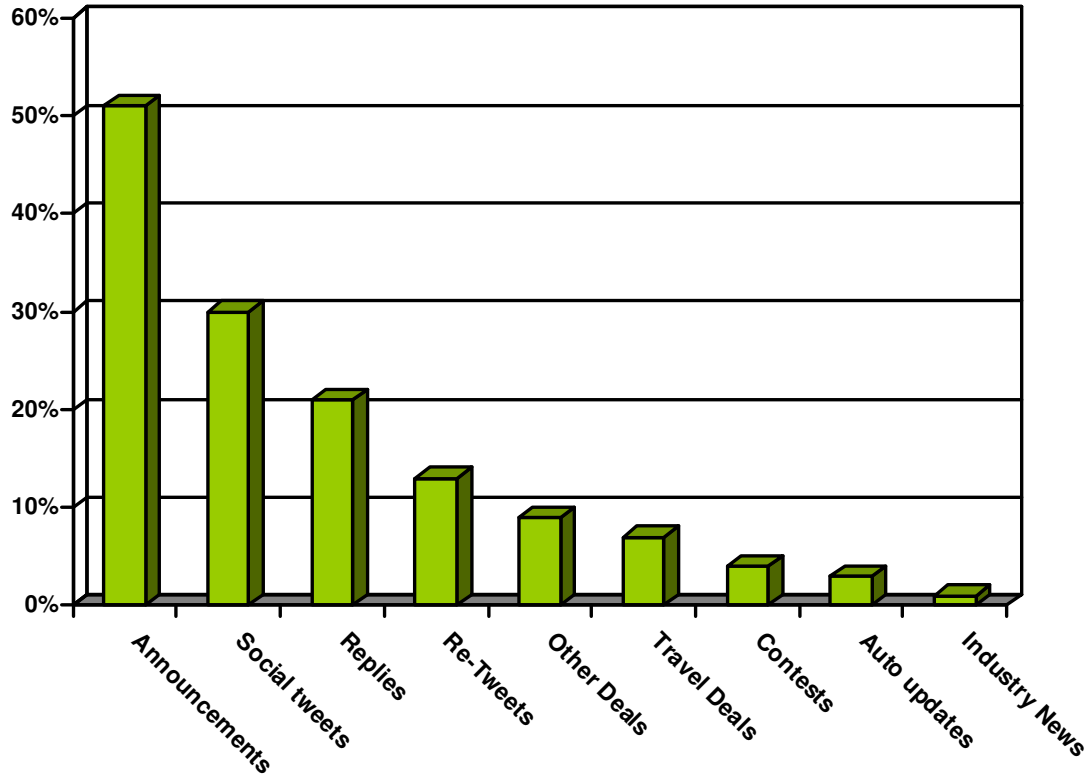
We looked at the Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs) for the Top U.S. MSA's (by population) and then searched on twitter to determine which groups have a twitter account.

Of 54 travel attraction organizations that represent the largest MSAs, 12 were not found on Twitter. The remaining 42 have twitter accounts but vary on how often they post updates and the type or style of their updates. Three had no tweets at all in the period studied; they were using their account as a "placeholder." We evaluated over 3000 (3231 to be exact) individual "tweets" posted by the remaining 39 CVBs over a 30-day period, from May 1-31, 2009, to find out what they are saying via Twitter.

The status updates were categorized into 10 groups. Some tweets matched more than one category and so were coded as both. The coding descriptions can be found in **Appendix B**.

The most common type of content was "Announcements about upcoming local events/news," representing 51% of all the messages.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Tweets (percent)



Other popular types include:

- Social tweets, 30%
- Replies, 21%
- Re-tweets, 13%

Less frequently used types are:

- Other (non-travel) deals, 9%
- Travel deals, 7%
- Contests, 4%
- Automatic updates, 3% (used exclusively by VisitTampaBay to provide weather updates)

61% of the status messages included a link to a web address, in addition to the other "content." Since Twitter limits messages to 140 characters, by including a link to a web address, users could direct followers or readers to blog postings, articles from the local or national media, Web pages, coupons or photo sharing sites. Statistics on the frequency or percentage of link types were not recorded in this study.

Discussion

One measure of a Twitter user's "effectiveness" is the number of followers it has attracted. In May, the top 10 CVBs in our sample, by followers are:

ScreenName	Organization Name	Followers in May
1. travelportland	Travel Portland	7999
2. VisitChicago	Chicagoland Regional Tourism Development Office	5231
3. BaltimoreMD	Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association	4784
4. VisitPhilly	Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation	3086
5. ExpCols	Greater Columbus Convention & Visitors Bureau	3079
6. PositivelyCleve	Positively Cleveland Convention & Visitors Bureau	3040
7. visitmusiccity	Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau	2715
8. VisitHoustonTX	Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau	2642
9. choosechicago	Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau	2158
10.VisitSanAntonio	San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau	2117

Another measure is by number of "tweets" in the time period. The top 10 most active Twitter users in our sample in May are:

ScreenName	Organization Name	Number of Tweets in May
1. VisitTampaBay	Tampa Bay & Company	481
2. Visitlauderdale	Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau	268
3. ExpCols	Greater Columbus Convention & Visitors Bureau	265
4. destinationdc	Destination DC	253
5. BaltimoreMD	Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association	174
6. VisitPhilly	Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation	129
7. vstpgh	Greater Pittsburgh Convention & Visitors Bureau	128
8. visitmusiccity	Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau	106
9. VisitChicago	Chicagoland Regional Tourism Development Office	100
10.Onlyinsf	San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau	96

However, if we posit that engaging one's followers on Twitter is the key to using Twitter effectively, then having "the most" tweets isn't enough.

Jason Snell of MacWorld.com identified a series of relevant guidelines for travel marketers in "Nine Twitter Tips for Business" (May 4, 2009) including:

- Don't automate it
- Be conversational
- Make sure your people are on Twitter, and refer to them
- Answer your mentions
- Search for your name
- Consider creating sub-accounts for sections of your business or customer base
- Use Twitter to ask your customers questions...and get good answers
- Be a good Twitter citizen

If CVBs are following these tips, then we can speculate that the users who post replies to followers, retweet messages from community partners, make social chatter, run contests and post deals are the ones who are actively trying to engage others and are using the site most effectively. Let's look at these different types of tweet in turn.

1. Replies to followers. Messages to potential visitors and to community partners have the effect of building those relationships. The following had the most "replies to followers" in May:

NewOrleansCVB	91
Visitlauderdale	71
VisitPhilly	50
VisitTampaBay	49
Onlyinsf	48
BaltimoreMD	48

Some examples of the "reply" messages posted by those in our sample are:

From NewOrleansCVB (New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau):
@sloeginfizzed Mark- We're so glad yall booked a last min trip down! For hotel deals in NOLA: [http://www.NewOrleansCVB \(New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau\).com/mediapackages](http://www.NewOrleansCVB (New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau).com/mediapackages)

From Visitlauderdale (Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau):
@adexec Bicycling along Hollywood Beach Boardwalk trail is fun. No cars. Or A1A Fort Lauderdale Beachfront promenade to Birch State Park.

From VisitTampaBay (Tampa Bay & Company):
@UniqueBeauty74 That's awesome we're so glad you're visiting! If you need any help planning, check out <http://ow.ly/6S58> or let us know!

From Onlyinsf (San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau):
@ingaboo We'd love to help! When are you coming to visit & what would you like to do? So many options to eat, drink, stay & see in SF.

From BaltimoreMD (Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association):
@BeerInBaltimore really, but doesn't go beyond taste to a more perfect union between beer and crab. What is you preferred accompaniment?

From VisitSanAntonio (San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau):
@petersendidit Hey there David! Hope you enjoy your trip. Let me know if you need anything while you're here.

From VisitPhilly (Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation):
@leeetrope sometimes I think New Yorkers don't realize how close they are to Philly.

From exploreStLouis (St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission):
@STLwinegirl are you attending any wine festivals this weekend?

2. Retweets from community partners. Users who follow their community partners and copy their news to their own page are solidifying their relationships with these partners. The Top 5 users who excelled at this are:

destinationdc	62
VisitTampaBay	35
BaltimoreMD	30
Visitlauderdale	30
ProvidenceRI	29

A few examples of "retweet" messages include:

From destinationdc (Destination DC):
RT @FreerSackler: New exhibition opening, "The Tsars and the East!" this Saturday at the Sackler Gallery! <http://bit.ly/1atYMk>

From destinationdc (Destination DC):
RT @VisitAnnapolis: RT @candlesoffmain: Make plans! Blue Angels practice show 5/19 2-4. Fly-over show 5/20 2pm. Historic Downtown Annapo ...

From VisitTampaBay (Tampa Bay & Company):
RT @10connects: news from tampa bay Night safari starts weekend of events with Jack Hanna at Busch Gardens: .. <http://tinyurl.com/cozslw>

From BaltimoreMD (Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association):
RT @MarylandTrip Preakness Celebration - Cool events leading up to the 134th running of the Preakness <http://ow.ly/6rjY>

From Visitlauderdale (Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau):
RT @SpaChic Mother's Day Lauderdale roundup---spas, swamp safari, brunch, butterflies, museums, more. <http://budurl.com/>

From ProvidenceRI (The Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau)
RT @HotelProvidence Mother's Day Brunch was successful! No special occasion needed-we offer Brunch each Sunday in Aspire from 10am-2pm!

From PhiladelphiaCVB (Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau):
RT @DrexelNews HUBO, Drexel's humanoid robot is at the Please Touch Museum now: <http://bit.ly/15Uli>

From OaklandCVB (Oakland Convention and Visitors Bureau):
RT @Clars_Auction - setting up for June 6-7 auction, including a collection of vintage cars, painting by Edgard Payne, 5 ct. Cartier ring

3. Social tweets. The social tweets tend to be the most “conversational.” These are messages that convey friendly chatter, invite followers to take action, or just ask followers what they are doing. The top 5 users of this type of messages are:

BaltimoreMD	110
Vstpgh	85
Visitlauderdale	79
NewOrleansCVB	71
VisitTampaBay	55

Some good examples of these types of posts are:

From BaltimoreMD (Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association):
Frontline workers put the charm back in Charm City! Big up to all my Certified Tourism Ambassadors... <http://bit.ly/wlvr9>

From VisitTampaBay (Tampa Bay & Company):
Just had a drink at the Rack in South Tampa, now heading over to see some good friends I haven't seen in a while in the Soho area.

From Visitlauderdale (Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau):
NFL meeting in Fort Lauderdale today. Select New Orleans to host Super Bowl 2013.

From Onlyinsf (San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau):
Meet us today! Warming Hut @ Crissy Field (11:30 am- 1:30 pm) 1st 30 participants receive a gift certificate for a Bay Quackers Duck Tour.

From vstpgh (Greater Pittsburgh Convention & Visitors Bureau):
Good morning Pittsburgh!

From nycgo (NYC & Company):
Art books on New York City run the gamut from menus to maps, but they all share a common, larger-than-life subject. <http://bit.ly/iFGLN>

From visitphoenix (Greater Phoenix Convention & Visitors Bureau):
<http://twitpic.com/62trt> - Reflection looks cool on this glass mural outside convention center

From VisitKC (Kansas City Convention & Visitors Association):
Sound Off: Where are your favorite places in KC to spend date night? At a jazz club? On a carriage ride through the Plaza? Fill us in.

4. Contests. Posting contests on Twitter is a great way to engage your followers. The CVBs who made the most use of these types of posts are:

VisitTampaBay	29
BaltimoreMD	17
Visitlauderdale	11
PositivelyCleve	7
VisitOrlando	7

Examples of these types of messages are:

From VisitTampaBay (Tampa Bay & Company):
Are you a mommy? Do you LUV to travel? Here's your chance to win a family pack of 4 SWA Tickets! <http://bit.ly/YxGih> (via @SouthwestAir)

From VisitTampaBay (Tampa Bay & Company):
Be sure to stay tuned to our Tweets at around 1pm ish as we will be posting the trivia question to win those tickets to Disney on Ice!

From BaltimoreMD (Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association):
2.5 hours left. Just RT to enter to win 2 tix to Morton's Eco-Friendly Wine & Spirits Dinner tonight. #mortonsbalt <http://tinyurl.com/qxe8h7>

From BaltimoreMD (Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association):
For 2 Brew at the Zoo tickets on 5/23 & 1 glass, name 1 of the bands playing Saturday. Use #ZooBrew in the answer. <http://bit.ly/h1P7s>

From Visitlauderdale (Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau):
Take beach personality quiz at <http://sunny.org/win> and be entered to win gr8 Lauderdale beach getaway #sunny

From PositivelyCleve (Positively Cleveland Convention & Visitors Bureau):
What's your favorite thing to do in CLE during the summer? Reply to enter to win 4 tix to Rib Cook-Off this wknd. Winner chosen tom., 10am.

From VisitOrlando (Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau):
Apply to spend 67 days doing Orlando's more than 100 attractions and share your experiences with the world along the way! <http://ow.ly/9K4T>

From Visitphoenix (Greater Phoenix Convention & Visitors Bureau):
Tomorrow's the next giveaway - Dinner and night stay at the Ritz-Carlton. Just gotta be our fan! <http://bit.ly/icvYu>

5. Deals. Consumers are interested in saving money, both in their own neighborhoods and when they are travelling. The CVBs who tweeted information about deals, for example, discounts, "2 for 1" offers, coupons, etc., were delivering information their followers would value. The sampled users with the highest number of these types of posts are:

VisitTampaBay	97
Visitlauderdale	73
NewOrleansCVB	58
VisitChicago	28
visitmusiccity	20

Some examples of these "deal" tweets:

From VisitTampaBay (Tampa Bay & Company):
New Hot Deal... Spring Wingate By Wyndham Golf Package from \$242 Ref #2055729 <http://ow.ly/7Jn2>

From Visitlauderdale (Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau):
Great deals on summer styles. Neiman Marcus Last Call Memorial Day Sale extended to 6/1 at Sawgrass Mills. Extra 20% off purchase

From NewOrleansCVB (New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau):
@mrsmartguy Gderon- For some great deals on hotels, restaurants & attractions in NOLA, check out: [http://www.NewOrleansCVB \(New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau\).com/mediapackages](http://www.NewOrleansCVB(NewOrleansMetropolitanConventionandVisitorsBureau).com/mediapackages)

From VisitChicago (Chicagoland Regional Tourism Development Office):
Featured hotel deal: Inn of Chicago Magnificent Mile <http://budurl.com/InnChiMag> Save 15% (25% off 2-nights) thru July.

From visitmusiccity (Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau):
Visiting Nashville for Memorial Day Weekend? Check out our valuable online coupons and do more for less in Music City! [#lp](http://tr.im/IStt)

From discover_la (LA INC., The Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau):
The Queen Mary is offering her signature cocktail – the Bloody Mary - for .36¢ on May 27 (the QM's 73rd Anniversary)

From iknowdenver (VISIT DENVER, The Convention & Visitors Bureau):
\$52.80 Deals: Exclusive! 4 Three-Day Passes to the UMS, reg. \$100, only \$52.80 (+service)! [#dnvrmusic](http://ow.ly/8yjE)

From VisitHoustonTX (Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau):
Houston's Friday Special. 10% off at the House of Blues. <http://tinyurl.com/qagqq8>

The Tweet Elite

Which CVB organizations are the best at using Twitter to connect with potential visitors, community partners and other important constituents?

Points were given to each group for placing in the top 5 in the studied tweet categories and for having the most followers and the most updates.

Our analysis has led us to name the following as the
DCI Top 6 Travel Tweet Elite.

They are listed in alphabetical order, not with respect to any rank order.



**Baltimore Area Convention and
Visitors Association**

**Greater Fort Lauderdale
Convention & Visitors Bureau**

greater FORT LAUDERDALE
sunny.org



**New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and
Visitors Bureau**

**Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing
Corporation**



Only in San Francisco
THE OFFICIAL VISITORS SITE FOR SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau

Tampa Bay & Company



Congratulations to all! Travel marketers can log on to Twitter and opt to “follow” these leaders. See them in action and try to replicate the things they are doing on Twitter.

Methods

A total of 3,231 tweets posted by 37 Convention and Visitors Bureaus during a 30-day period from May 1 to 31, 2009, were content analyzed and compared. These groups represent the major cities in the top 50 MSAs in the United States. No groups representing states or other countries were included.

A complete list of CVB organizations and their Twitter usernames used in the study are found in **Appendix A**.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. The sample size may not adequately reflect the Twitter usage of all Travel Destination Marketers in the United States. The content postings containing links to Web addresses were not analyzed. These posts could contain pieces of information that would have altered the percentages reported in the findings section.

APPENDIX A: CVB Organizations and their Twitter ScreenName

Username	Organization
BaltimoreMD	Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association
BostonUSA	Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau
CharlottGotAlot	Visit Charlotte
Choosechicago	Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau
Destinationdc	Destination DC
discover_LA	LA INC., The Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau
ExpCols	Greater Columbus Convention & Visitors Bureau
Explorestlouis	St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission
GoGreensboro	Greensboro Area Convention & Visitors Bureau
HartfordCVB	Greater Hartford Convention & Visitors Bureau
HighPointCVB	High Point Convention & Visitors Bureau
Iknowdenver	VISIT DENVER, The Convention & Visitors Bureau
Meetaustin	Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau
MeetMinneapolis	Meet Minneapolis
MiamiandBeaches	Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (GMCVB)
NewOrleansCVB	New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau
Nycgo	NYC & Company
OaklandCVB	Oakland Convention and Visitors Bureau
Onlyinsf	San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau
PhiladelphiaCVB	Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau
PositivelyCleve	Positively Cleveland Convention & Visitors Bureau
ProvidenceRI	The Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau
Travelportland	Travel Portland
VaBeachCVB	Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau
visit_sanjose	San Jose Convention and Visitors Bureau
Visitatlantaga	Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau
VisitChicago	Chicago Plus - Chicagoland Regional Tourism Development Office
VisitDetroit	Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau (DMCVB)
VisitHoustonTX	Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau
VisitKC	Kansas City Convention & Visitors Association
Visitlauderdale	Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau
Visitmilwaukee	Greater Milwaukee Convention & Visitors Bureau
Visitmusiccity	Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau
VisitOrlando	Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc
VisitPhilly	Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation
Visitphoenix	Greater Phoenix Convention & Visitors Bureau

Username	Organization
Visitsaltlake	The Salt Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau (SLCVB)
VisitSanAntonio	San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau
Visitsandiego	San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau
VisitSeattle	Seattle's Convention and Visitors Bureau
VisitTampaBay	Tampa Bay & Company
Vstpgh	Greater Pittsburgh Convention & Visitors Bureau

APPENDIX B: Tweet categories

Announcements about upcoming local events/news – News about an upcoming event, like an art gallery opening, a concert, etc.

Automatic updates – One of the “don’ts” from Jason Snell’s tips. This is when Twitter account holders use a service such as TwitterFeed to directly channel content into Twitter posts, instead of hand-feeding their posts. The outcome is a series of impersonal, uninteresting content.

Contests – Information about a contest and prizes – sometimes require doing something on twitter (becoming a follower or retweeting a message) or sometimes require going to another website or showing up somewhere in person.

Industry news – General travel industry news, e.g. about airlines, travel reports, trends, etc.

Information about local travel deals/ services – How to save money on some travel-related venues in town, get coupons, etc.

Information about other local deal/services – NOT travel related – How to save money on things not specifically for visitors, e.g. restaurants.

Links to websites – Posting includes a URL

Retweets from community travel industry partners – Posting starts with “RT” to show the content has been previously posted by another user.

Replies/messages to followers – Posting starts with @ to indicate a direct message to another user.

Social tweets – Welcome messages, friendly chatter

Other – Posting does not fit any of these categories