

Social Media and Shopping Centers

State of the Industry

Mid-Year 2016

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Experience Measurement


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Introduction

The following insights were gathered in a study conducted in July 2016 with the help of ICSC and the MOCIAL planning committee. It was conducted among Shopping Center executives in the U.S. responsible for national and regional portfolios. In addition, Alexander Babbage tracks and maintains social media statistics for Super Regional, Regional, Lifestyle, Entertainment, and Value/Outlet Centers. These statistics are used to create Shopping Center industry benchmarks, identify highly effective strategies and provide comparison between similar properties. All Shopping Centers over 300,000 square feet GLA are included, with the exception of those who had less than 100 followers (“Centers” or “Shopping Centers”).

Are Centers still active on social media?

The majority of Shopping Centers are active on social media with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram being the most important platforms.

The largest number of respondents cited Facebook as important in communicating with their key audiences, with 42% dubbing Facebook Posts very important and 21% stating that Facebook paid advertising was very important. Twitter and Instagram trailed well behind Facebook in importance, and 50% of respondents claim they have not used Instagram for their businesses in the last 12 months. None of the survey respondents found Pinterest to be important with 71% saying they had not used Pinterest in the past 12 months. Only a few respondents (4%) found YouTube to be very important and almost half (46%) had not used the platform as a social marketing tool in the past 12 months.

These survey findings are largely in line with the benchmark data—shown below—which indicate that multiple platforms are used by many Shopping Centers; Facebook is the dominant platform while Instagram still trails Twitter. Few Centers are engaging with users on Pinterest or YouTube, although Entertainment Centers, including Disney, make extensive use of YouTube.

Percentage of Centers Using Each Platform	Total No. Centers	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Pinterest	YouTube
Super Regional	423	88%	74%	52%	8%	6%
Regional	776	60%	42%	27%	7%	4%
Lifestyle	471	63%	46%	33%	13%	9%
Value / Outlet	124	74%	60%	55%	11%	6%
Entertainment	18	61%	61%	39%	11%	22%
Total/Average	1,812	69%	56%	41%	10%	9%

Table 1: Percentage of Shopping Centers over 300,000 sq ft using each of the monitored social media platforms

Measuring Success

Audience Size

The average audience size is the first metric to identify which Centers are using a particular communications channel to reach their audiences. Across the industry, this metric varies widely by platform as can be seen in Table 2, below. However, the number of followers on a particular platform is not the best indicator that a Center is reaching its audience as it fails to take into account engagement with the post.





Fan Averages				
Super Regional	28,894	1,766	1,552	244
Regional	10,704	2,092	887	123
Lifestyle	19,318	6,075	3,926	296
Value/Outlet	28,296	945	957	341
Entertainment	84,272	9,952	13,123	225
Total/Average	34,297	4,166	4,089	246

Table 2: Average Fans/Followers by platform

Engagement

While measuring progress against the industry average, engagement is a good starting point. Comparing a single Center's engagement from post to post allows social media managers to zero in on the types of media that call a fan base to action – by re-posting or reacting – as shown in Table 3, below.

It is important to keep in mind that what may look like a low engagement score—less than 1%—is actually standard in the industry. Centers with high numbers of followers will naturally have to engage with more users in order increase their engagement percentage. Centers with lower followings will see their numbers vary greatly, with spikes in engagement appearing even with a few extra likes or comments. For this reason, the total number of fans/followers should be considered together with engagement.





Average Engagement by Platform				
Super Regional	0.09%	0.08%	1.09%	0.02%
Regional	0.11%	0.08%	0.92%	0.02%
Lifestyle	0.13%	0.08%	1.40%	0.01%
Value/Outlet	0.15%	0.04%	1.95%	0.14%
Entertainment	0.44%	0.16%	1.15%	0.09%
Overall	0.11%	0.08%	1.20%	0.03%

Table 3: Average Engagement by platform

Frequency

How frequently each of these platforms is posted to also varies widely between Centers. As shown in Table 4, Centers are posting on Facebook and Twitter once daily on average and, for those that are using Instagram or Pinterest, once every two days – although this varies widely, see Table 5, Top 25 Centers and Platform Performance on Page 7.





Average Posts Per Day				
Super Regional	1.0	1.2	0.6	0.9
Regional	0.9	1.0	0.4	0.4
Lifestyle	1.1	1.6	0.7	0.4
Value/Outlet	1.1	1.0	0.4	1.2
Entertainment	2.0	7.7	0.9	0.5
Overall	1.1	1.3	0.5	0.6

Table 4: Average frequency of posting/pinning per day by platform

Best Practices

The range of time spent on managing social media varies, with the majority of respondents (58%) devoting between 5 and 16 hours per week to social media marketing. Most of that time is spent creating content—50% estimated that they spend between five and 16 hours creating content each week – rather than monitoring which takes a back seat due to time constraints. The majority (67%) say they only spend between one and eight hours monitoring their social and digital initiatives each week.

The following are insights from top performers on each platform and some of the practices that other Centers should study.

Facebook

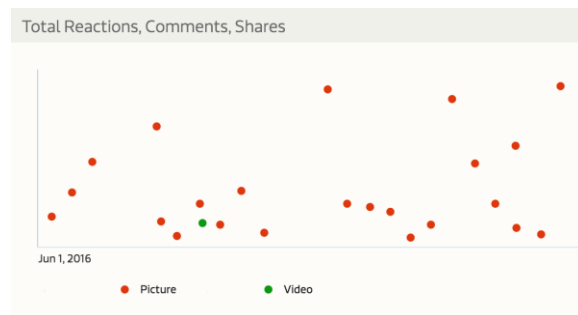
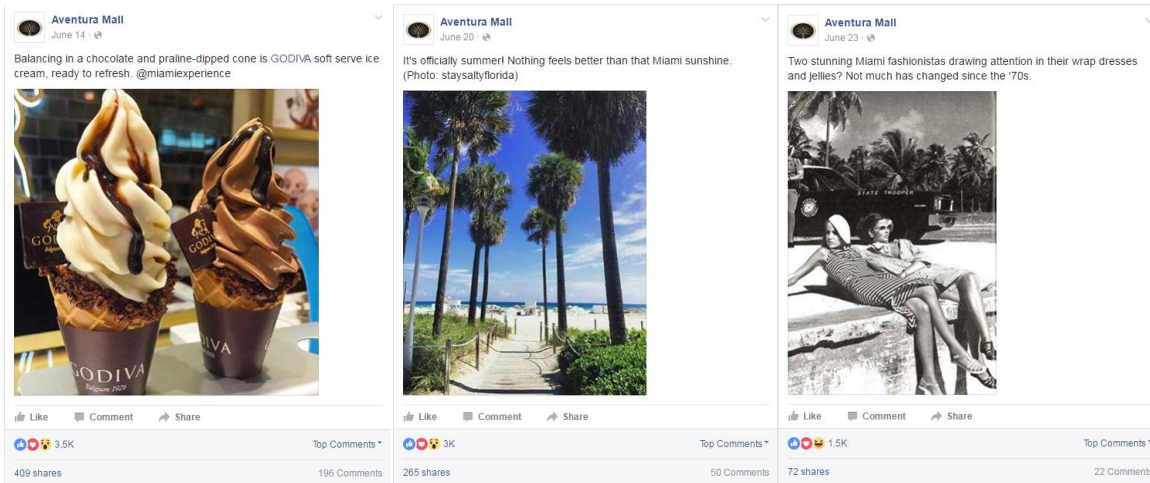


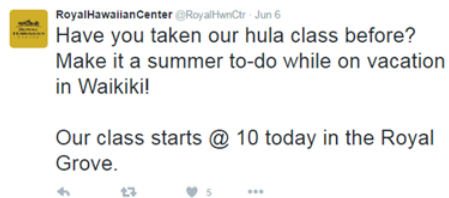
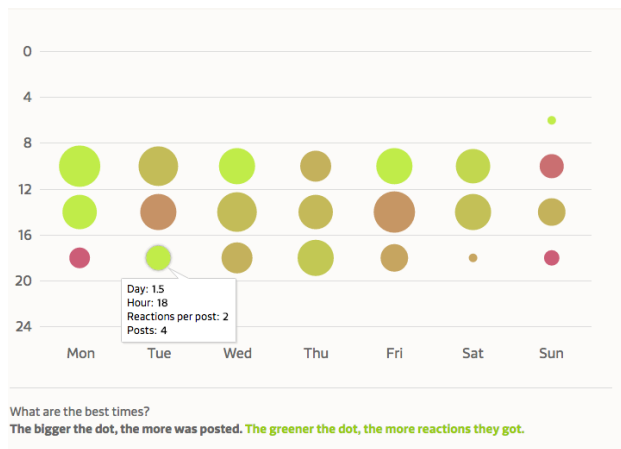
Figure 1: Total reactions, comments and shares, June 1-30

While video remains a talked-about medium on Facebook and tends to garner the most organic impressions, top performing Centers (when measured using engagement relative to audience size) have found that photos are the most likely to receive likes, shares and comments. Take, for example, the #1 performer on Facebook **Aventura Mall**, an upscale super-regional shopping center in a northern suburb of Miami: all of their posts with top engagement are photos.



Twitter

Twitter is less about what’s happening at your Center and more about being a part of the community conversation, whether that’s a local event or globally trending hashtag. Twitter’s fleeting nature makes time and frequency of posts two of the most important factors. Look at Royal Hawaiian Center, an upscale lifestyle Center in Honolulu: They average 5.1 posts per day, and engagement is buzzing most earlier in the day, between 8am and 4pm during the work week. Take a look at the chart to get a feel for how regularly the Center posts, and when audiences are most engaged.



The takeaway? On Twitter, talk when you know the most people are listening—even if studying the reception of your own tweets is the only way to get there.

Instagram

Images with a more commercial aesthetic—text overlays, obvious branding, etc.—may work well on other platforms, but on Instagram it is essential to post high-quality, engaging images. The Centers that had the most engagement from the highest number of followers were less likely to promote a particular sale, promotion, or brand, but were generally focused on promoting a particular aesthetic for their properties. Posts should be focused more on the experience: the drip of an ice cream cone on a summer day at a specialty shop on the property; a behind-the-scenes shot setting up for an event taking place that day; a colorful image of a mural or particularly creative store display. Ponce City Market, a mixed use redevelopment in Atlanta strikes a great balance with their posts, which maintain an artful aesthetic and strong, consistent brand voice to yield a high percentage of engagement for their solid following.





Industry Leaders in Social Media

The following Top 25, ranked by number of Facebook fans, can be used to identify high performing Centers in social media and then utilized to research their approach and prioritization. For the full listing of Centers, please email us.

	Center Name	Facebook Fans	Twitter Followers	Tweets/day	Instagram Followers	Instagrams/day
1	Aventura Mall	504,875	8,994	5.8	28,885	1.0
2	Plaza Las Américas	492,100	200	0.8	20,633	2.1
3	The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas	461,450	433,858	4.4	68,916	0.6
4	Universal CityWalk Hollywood	401,069	48,741	1.9	45,451	1.1
5	Sawgrass Mills	314,628	7,346	2.5	11,383	0.7
6	Pike Place Market	257,241	62,844	1.9	29,546	0.7
7	Bal Harbour Shops	250,065	10,933	1.7	26,076	1.6
8	The Florida Mall	218,891	14,550	1.7	7,073	0.5
9	Disneyland Today	198,738	440,855	49.0		
10	Broadway at the Beach	155,345	16,017	3.7	13,192	0.6
11	Dolphin Mall	149,289	1,600	0.0		
12	Westfield Valley Fair	141,346	3,697	0.0	2,118	0.9
13	The Mall of San Juan	136,088	275	0.0		
14	The Galleria, Houston	135,015	13,646	1.3	4,337	0.1
15	The Grove	132,393	160,266	1.7	61,292	1.0
16	Garden State Plaza	125,387	4,752	0.2	2,094	0.1
17	King of Prussia	125,191	6,498	1.0	3,336	0.5
18	Ontario Mills	121,115	2,667	3.6	835	1.3
19	Galleria Dallas	112,061	6,356	2.4	8,109	0.9
20	Roosevelt Field	111,358	2,839	1.6	2,015	0.7
21	Nebraska Crossing Outlets	111,238	9,097	1.4	5,713	0.1
22	Opry Mills	107,695	13,999	7.0	3,357	0.9
23	Westfield Topanga & The Village	103,025	1,602	0.4	2,593	0.3
24	Westfield Century City	96,281	2,313	0.6	6,380	0.0
25	Memorial City	94,892	2,048	0.1	960	0.7

Table 5: Top 25 Centers and Platform Performance

Managing and Measuring ROI in the Social Field

Most survey respondents (83%) agreed that the key goals of their digital marketing campaigns were to drive foot traffic (83%) and therefore sales to the Center, and to strengthen perceptions of their mall or company (71%) with only 29% saying they were active to keep up with competitors.

Compared to other marketing initiatives, social and digital were considered to represent the future of marketing communications (50% strongly agreed) driven by their effectiveness in delivering both targeted and mass-market messages

Content was created in-house by the majority of respondents (88%) but Centers also use agencies heavily with 38% having their digital creative generated by an agency and 42% using creative supplied by retailers.

None of the survey respondents sell advertising on their Center’s website.

While the annual budget for social/digital initiatives varied widely, most respondents (45.7%) were spending \$30,000 or more.



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Most respondents (67%) agreed, to varying degrees, that social and digital initiatives represent the future of marketing communications. But only 21% of those surveyed are measuring their return on investment in digital and social media marketing.

Most marketers (58%) are reporting their digital and social media progress on a monthly basis. One quarter (25%) of the marketing professionals surveyed do not report their progress at all.

Of those that do measure their ROI, most rely on specific promotions or coupons to measure the reach of social campaigns. Marketers reported measuring engagement, reach, and retailers' incremental sales when tied to a promotion. At least half of respondents (50%) have specifically looked for a correlation between Center sales and social/digital engagement. Of those that looked, almost two-thirds (64%) found a correlation.

Maximizing the time and budget invested in building a digital audience does not have to rely solely on the analytics tools provided by social platforms or online coupons. Centers can gain a marketing and leasing edge by comparing their geographic and demographic strengths to that of their key competitors. In addition to an increasing number of social insights, Alexander Babbage offers a comprehensive suite of services to understand where your shoppers are coming from—as well as who shops your competitors—along with analytics-to-action insight on increasing your Centers' sales.

Summary

Facebook remains the most popular social outlet for Shopping Centers to communicate with their shoppers, and strong visuals are important there and across all social networks. Marketing professionals are investing more time than money into the online platforms for their Centers, but this is likely to change as the platforms increasingly move to a “pay-to-play” approach to surfacing Center content on the shoppers' timelines.

Shopping Center executives say they see social/digital media as a key tool for the future of marketing. As the time needed to create content that can engage a shopper increases, analysis and careful monitoring of what is working, where and why is critical to the success of a Shopping Center.

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