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**SOCIAL  
TRAVEL  
SUMMIT**

**THINK TANK REPORT**

“Navigating the Future”





# THINK TANK REPORT

## “Navigating the Future”

### Overview

The first *Social Travel Summit (STS)* was held in Leipzig, Germany on 15-16 April 2014, gathering together 120 delegates from the travel industry, travel PR, and the professional travel blogger and social media influencer community. The Social Travel Summit is an initiative of *iambassador* in collaboration with *Reiseblogger Kollektiv* and *Traveldudes*. The first STS was sponsored by the *German National Tourist Board* and *Leipzig Tourism* along with *MSC Cruises*, *HouseTrip*, *Germanwings* and *Deutsche Bahn*.

The Social Travel Summit is an exclusive opportunity to engage and connect with specially-invited leading travel bloggers and online influencers from around the world and to be part of a high-level discussion about the future of online travel marketing. The bloggers and influencers are specially selected based on the high quality of the content produced, online reach and track record in working with the tourism industry. The Summit brings together leading travel bloggers and influencers from around the world and is a unique opportunity for industry professionals to connect with them and build mutually-beneficial relationships.

A key objective of the summit is to focus on the way the industry and bloggers already work together and find practical ways to improve it. One important component in the two-day STS Leipzig was a 2-hour "Think Tank" session in which a selected core of around thirty delegates were asked to discuss five specific topics and if possible come up with some key points, recommendations, suggestions, or solutions.

Their discussions, findings and recommendations are presented in this report.

Based on these discussions, a 'STS Code of Standards & Ethics for Professional Travel Bloggers' was drawn up. We encourage travel bloggers to use this Code as guidance in their blogging and business practices.



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## The Think Tank

### Methodology

In the weeks before the summit, we invited all STS delegates to participate in an online survey to find out what specific topics they thought we should tackle in the Think Tank, what ideas they already held on those topics, and at the same time gather a little data on the way they work with social media. The ideas and opinions gathered in the survey were used to determine the topics and seed the discussions in the Think Tank.

We allocated five topics to five tables and appointed a Topic Leader to each. We then divided the delegates among the tables, trying to get a balanced mix of bloggers, PRs, DMOs and industry. Every 20 minutes the delegates moved to the next table.

The Topic Leaders stayed with their table, briefed the incoming delegates, steered the conversation, and at the end, summarised the points made. Each Topic Leader was given a sheet with the topic outline, suggested goals, and some ideas/talking points culled from the survey.





## Topic 1 Bottlenecks

# What issues are holding us back in the way we (industry & bloggers) collaborate and work together?

Topic Leader: Rob Lloyd (Blog: [Stop Having a Boring Life](#))

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The new travel blogging community has come a long way in a short space of time and has forged entirely new relationships and new ways of working with the travel & tourism industry. The process has been quick, but patchy. Many Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs), specialist travel PRs and travel/transport providers understand the new relationships many more don't but even among the most engaged and forward thinking travel bloggers and travel/tourism organisations, there are still bits of the relationship that either aren't working properly or are yet to be worked out.

Delegates discussed some of the areas that need attention.

Both travel industry delegates and bloggers agreed there is a shortfall in marketing expertise when it comes to creating campaigns/projects. Many bloggers lack the ability to understand strategic marketing goals, and many marketers lack the ability to articulate them. Social media and industry conferences provide a really useful opportunity for both sides to learn more about each others' work, but we need to attend them all delegates agreed that not enough bloggers attend industry events, and way too few industry executives attend blogger conferences[1] and we need to create more small group training and networking opportunities.

Delegates proposed another novel innovation for improving the quality of collaborations. Many travel industry marketers, PRs & DMOs tend to fall back on a 'cookie cutter' approach to campaigns, with the targets/results measured in a simple tickbox fashion (Eg. number of tweets, photos, blog posts, videos, etc.). While this may make it easier to organise and evaluate social media & blog content, it misses an opportunity for developing creative collaborative projects that stem from the expertise/experience of bloggers and journalists. This situation could be improved easily.

It's not unusual for publications to receive requests for their publishing calendar, from PRs and media buyers. It's a well-established practice that gives companies the chance to pitch story ideas, suitable products, and innovative synchronised marketing/advertising campaigns well in advance. Delegates considered that similarly, travel companies, DMOs and PRs should both offer, and welcome requests for, their own marketing campaign calendars, to give bloggers the chance to pitch creative ideas for collaboration.



If organisations share their strategic and tactical goals for a campaign or year and offer opportunities for more two-way exchange of ideas and brainstorming sessions to develop projects that can reach those goals, then maybe we can move beyond standard trip itineraries based on a brochure, to generate original highquality and differentiated content.

Sometimes when projects are put together, the general objectives are understood by everyone, but not the specific details. Bloggers explained how undefined targets and expectations can cause problems on fam or press trips. For instance, PRs/DMOs expect five blog posts on a five day trip plus videos, social media postings and high resolution photography whilst the trip itinerary is fully loaded with no available time to do the work.

This is a direct legacy hangover from the traditional media press trip. Press trip itineraries have always been overcrowded because DMOs are under pressure from their stakeholders (hoteliers, attractions, etc.) to cram in as many site visits as possible. It wasn't so critical with traditional journalists because there was no 'live' component; journalists gathered info (or had it mailed to them afterwards!) and wrote a 1,000word feature article when they got back home.

Furthermore many PRs/DMOs expect bloggers to meet those targets in return for a free trip, where probloggers may consider those 'live' activities to be additional social media PR work, separate from normal journalism. As one blogger put it: "You can treat me the same as a traditional journalist, in which case I'll just write a single post when I get home, but to be honest that won't entice me on your trip because my blog and my readers demand more content than that. Instead I'll work with DMOs who pay for some of my work".

Bloggers felt that some DMOs/PRs see them as a source of cheap labour. They can get a few articles, plus photos for their brochure and some videos without having to hire a procameraman. Another problem area left over from traditional media is the geographical allocation of marketing budgets. Bloggers gave examples, for instance, where a German blogger who writes in English, couldn't join a blog trip in Spain.

The DMO's German office wouldn't fund/support it because the blog is in English. The UK office wouldn't because the blogger is based in Germany. In the end a Swedish blogger went, funded by the Scandinavian office, even though she writes in English.

The tourism industry has to stop allocating online marketing budgets to geographical regions and allocate instead to languages.

Bloggers thought that the industry often fails to maximise on the marketing potential of their work. Often DMOs and industry partners don't follow up on blogger trips by cross promoting articles and resharing or highlighting the content on social media.



"When we work with the industry and produce great content it often just sits on our blogs." said one blogger, "The work we produce should be better shared and utilised by the tourist board/travel companies to broaden the reach of campaigns and further the return on their investment." Another said: "We've been on campaigns where the social media has been on autopilot without any notice or sharing of blogger content." The view was that industry & bloggers need to work in a more coordinated way and for longer, hopefully establishing longterm relationships.

Delegates noted that the industry sometimes has trouble trying to find suitable bloggers to work with. Several bloggers said they had been approached by DMOs to join a blogger trip which simply didn't match their niche subject. One said "I get invitations like this daily. For example: they invite me to a family blogger trip. I don't even have kids. I hate kids!" Industry delegates confirmed that this is a big problem for many PRs, DMOs and travel providers. They don't know how to find suitable bloggers, where to look, or how to evaluate them. The Think Tank had a topic that focused on this area (Topic #3 Blogger Profile) but delegates still discussed two particular bottlenecks the need for a centralised database or directory of bloggers, and the need for bloggers to be more professional about sharing their profile.

The idea of a centralised database is not a new one, and several organisations have been working on their own versions of such a resource. Some commercial organisations such as Cision and Travmedia already have large databases of specialist journalists and bloggers, which they offer to companies as part of their service.

Other organisations such as the Professional Travel Bloggers Association have databases of their own members, but as yet, there isn't a generally accepted selfedited directory or database for bloggers to promote themselves and industry to search. Many probloggers have now taken on board the need to be more professional in presenting their skills and offer a downloadable 'Media Kit' (usually a PDF) with full details about their work, their statistics, their policies and objectives, and all backed up with case studies. Industry delegates were keen to see blogger media kits become the established norm. The delegates summarised their list of problem areas and shortcomings:

**Media Kits:** Not all bloggers have a web page or downloadable summary of their blogs, its marketing profile, its advertising & marketing opportunities and policies, a detailed breakdown of their statistics, and their influence/awards. Those that do are often not detailed enough for the marketers, PRs and DMOs in the Think Tank. The view was that bloggers need to be more professional and commercially minded.

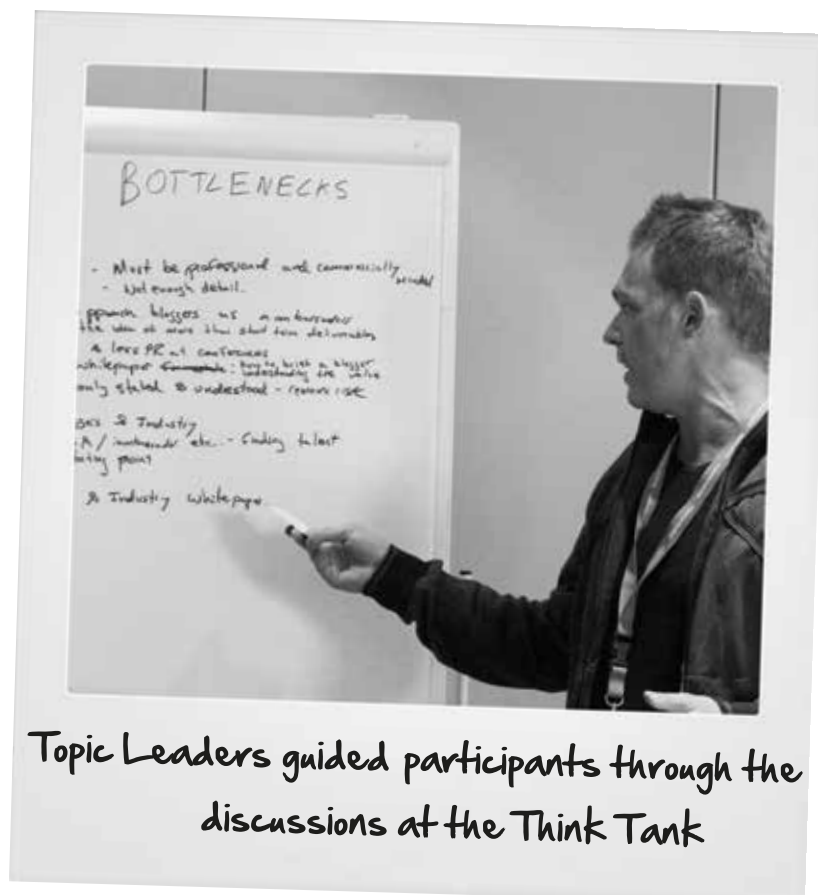
**An end to shortterm...ism!** More long term engagement is needed to establish relationships, generate new ideas, and build bloggers into brand ambassadors.

**Expectations** should be clearly stated and understood between bloggers and the industry. More dialogue is needed between the parties before working together to ensure there are no mismatches & misunderstandings.

**More education** is needed for bloggers and industry so they have a better understanding of how each works. That means attending conferences and pursuing training/consultancy opportunities. Not enough travel & tourism organisations attend blogger & social media conferences. Not enough bloggers attend industry events. That said, bloggers felt, as publishers, they'd like to meet more marketers and fewer PRs at conferences.

**The industry** wants a central database as a starting point for finding bloggers. Organisations like iambassador or the Professional Travel Bloggers Association are in a position to offer their own versions, limited to their own members.

**Both parties** think there is a need for a blogger/industry White Paper to establish protocols for the way they work together. (This report is expected to start that process).



Topic Leaders guided participants through the discussions at the Think Tank





## Topic 2 Transparency, Ethics & Independence

# How do bloggers maintain their credibility now that they combine editorial and commercial roles? Should industry and bloggers always be transparent about sponsorship? How transparent? What are the guidelines? What should they expect of each other?

Topic Leader: Audrey Scott (Blog: [Uncornered Market](#))

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This is a crucial topic area for the travel industry, media and consumers, and one that has been hotly debated since blogging began to take off a decade ago. In the past there has always been a clear and well-established separation between editors and publishers. Editors' and journalists' (staff & freelance) primary responsibility has been to protect the editorial integrity of their product, where the job of the publisher was to make that content pay. The emergence of self-publishing journalists, "bloggers", broke that system.

Bloggers have to be both Woodward & Bernstein AND Murdoch & Harmsworth at the same time. Where does this leave the other parties, ie. industry and consumers?

**Industry:** If travel providers and destination marketers were worried in the past about what independently minded journalists might write about their product, at least they had somewhere to appeal (the editor, the publisher). On the other hand, now the journalist is a publisher too, perhaps a commercial arrangement rather than an editorial one, might secure more favourable coverage?

**Consumers:** In the past, consumers could trust journalists to be (for the most part) balanced & impartial, and if there was any influence, to declare it. How far can they trust the new generation of bloggers, who can make up their own rules as they go along? These themes 'meet the metal' when it comes to [fam trips](#).

Traditional journalists have been debating the ethics of writing about hosted travel for decades at least, and were quick to [scrutinise](#) & criticise bloggers when they found them competitively pitching for the same privileged resources.



Although the travel industry and travel media have understood and been operating the fam trip system for years, consumers have largely been unaware of it. They may have had their suspicions that the journalist/presenter had not paid for their trip, but they relied on the editorial reputation of the publisher/broadcaster to ensure that what they were reading/viewing was balanced.

Ironically, the emergence of selfpublishing bloggers has highlighted the issue because bloggers, having a personal relationship with their readers, have tended to be more transparent about these arrangements than traditional media have. Nearly all bloggers will make it clear when a trip they are writing about has been hosted or "sponsored". The same cannot be said for many newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters.

Bloggers may have transparent tendencies (**reinforced officially in the USA since 2009 by the Federal Trade Commission** and in the UK since 2013 by the **Advertising Standards Authority**), when it comes to fam trips, but the waters have been a little muddier around issues such as sponsored links, guest posts, and paid campaigns.

STS delegates raised a number of points in the Think Tank survey and the Think Tank discussion on Transparency, Ethics & Independence.

**How do bloggers stay transparent** while at the same time bringing marketing value to the brand? There is an art to it, so you aren't spamming your stream. It's a fine balance. Be selective. As Mark Schaefer recently wrote about in *The Slippery Slope of Influence Marketing*, "emerging Citizen Influencers have to be very judicious in their relationships with brands."

**Is sponsored content good or bad?** Where professional bloggers thrive on this as a source of income, others only make 'pocket money' from it, and some purist bloggers despise it as a practice. Google has been on a witch hunt in the last 24 months, trying to weed out 'paidfor', 'sponsored' or 'unnatural' links.

**How exactly should bloggers be transparent?** Is it enough to make a sitewide policy statement for their blog, or should it be individual statements on each post? The FTC says you can't assume that people will read posts in succession, and some posts may not have been 'supported', so you need to disclose with each new post.

**When should the need to declare be triggered?** If a blogger didn't travel free, but paid a low/-discounted/trade price, that should probably still be declared. What about a nonsponsored trip with a sponsored component? An overall post about a destination (a week in Catalonia) with a paragraph about an excursion that was free (a morning at the Salvador Dali museum) should probably include an inline declaration in that paragraph.



**What if the blogger** doesn't like a travel product and gives it a bad review. Would declaring it as a sponsored trip be necessary? Would it be rubbing salt in the wound?

From the blogger's point of view it might be useful to demonstrate the strength of their editorial independence. For the travel provider/host, it would be less welcome. The ASA's guidance is that only positive reviews need be declared. (The issue of bad reviews is tackled in Topic #1 Bottlenecks and Topic #3 Blogger Profile)

**Should transparency apply to all platforms?** Should there be a declaration of sponsorship/support on Facebook posts, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter and Youtube? The FTC says 'yes'. How detailed and what are the practicalities of that? For microblog posts (there's no room for a normal declaration in a 145 character Twitter post) the solution must be hashtags but they have to become well-established for consumers to understand them. Many bloggers have used #SPON to denote 'sponsored' but #AD is shorter and more understandable and has been gaining traction.

**If a blogger is paid to publish** a guest post about a travel product or destination, it is an advertorial and should be clearly declared as such. Sometimes bloggers will take free guest posts when they are well-written and fit the style of the blog. Should these always be declared? If they are coming from a commercial copywriter/blogger, yes.

The clue that it is 'advertorial' often comes in the pitch, when the importance of an embedded link in the copy is mentioned.

The instinct to set out and agree a code of ethics for journalists is not new (eg. [ASTW](#), [BGTW](#), [NUJ](#)) and more recently there have been [attempts to do the same](#) for blogging (eg [Reiseblogger](#)). Nevertheless there is a clear need for a Travel Blogger Code of Ethics that addresses the needs of bloggers, the travel industry and consumers. The Think Tank participants unanimously agreed that disclosure is a good thing. Treat your readers or customers as you would want to be treated and came up with some principles that should be included.

### Principles for Bloggers:

1. If you have a negative experience, ask for the full story and give useful feedback.
2. Have a section in your media pack that covers how you deal with negative experiences.
3. Consistency of voice. Write it the way you'd normally write it. If readers detect a change of tone, they'll suspect insincerity or advertorial.
4. Put yourself in the position of your readers. What would you expect?
5. Adopt a Code of Ethics your own or an agreed industrywide code and display it.
6. Be true to your brand. If you don't normally write about spas, be prepared to pass on the invitation to be pampered in a luxury resort spa in the Caribbean .. and be paid for it.
7. Be transparent about what you can do, how far you can go to pass on any marketing message

### Principles for Industry:

1. Research your blogger and talk with them so you can build up mutual trust.
2. Understand the perspective of the blogger, what their objectives are, and what they can, can't or won't do.
3. Keep up the dialogue, before a collaboration, during and after. Build a relationship. Blogger relationships can continue for years to everyone's mutual benefit. So don't think of a collaboration with a blogger as a standalone/oneoff project.
4. Be transparent. Don't try to cover things up. If something goes wrong, discuss openly with a blogger how a negative experience can be improved.
5. Don't try to control the message. Let go of the brand. ("Trust your feelings, Luke!")



Plenary session at STS Leipzig



on Content Marketing



### Topic 3 Blogger Profile

**Bloggers are diverse. How does the industry pick good from bad, pro from amateur, specialist from general? Where do they look, what should they look for, what criteria or statistics should they use to judge, and what criteria or statistics should they be wary of?**

Topic Leader: Abigail King (Blog: [Inside The Travel Lab](#))

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We use the word 'blogger' as a generic catchall word to cover an everincreasing variety of roles. The definition of a blogger was quite narrow when they first appeared ie. somebody who wrote a blog. Quickly it expanded into personal or serious bloggers, then professional bloggers, then bloggers who don't really write so much as take photographs, or videos, or who may or may not have a blog, but post on Facebook, Twitter, G+, Pinterest, or Instagram, where they have huge influence, and so on! No wonder the travel & tourism industry struggles to work out who is who, which bloggers would be best to work with, how to judge that, and where they should look for them! Delegates briefly discussed the definition of a professional blogger vs a hobby/semiprofessional blogger and considered when a blogger becomes "professional".

The general view was that a 'probblogger' is someone who makes a fulltime living from their blog/brand and its associated work/services. It might be, and often is, that revenue from the blog itself (advertising, sponsorship, affiliate sales, marketing campaigns) accounts for only a small portion compared to the blogger's income from public speaking, consultancy, training, book sales, traditional print articles, and/or copywriting.

On the narrow or broad definition of what is a blogger, delegates played with suggestions that 'influencer' or 'publisher' might be better alternative names for some types of blogger, but in the end thought that there is little point trying to nail it down.



These things will get decided by general usage. 'Blogger' is a good catch-all.

The focus of the discussion on this topic was on what criteria should the travel industry use to identify bloggers they might want to work with, and what aspects of their work should bloggers promote to heighten their profile, and how.

### Big numbers v small numbers

Delegates agreed that a blogger's statistics are not always the most important yardstick. For example, a blogger's 30,000 unique monthly visitors and 60,000 twitter following are not going to do much for building awareness of your cruise line's familyfriendly facilities, if they visit and follow him for his wildlife photography and wilderness trekking posts.

So Stage One of any research into bloggers must be read their blog.

Do they write about what you want to talk about for an audience who are keen to hear it?

How many of them want to hear it, is secondary.

Big numbers also become less likely and less important, the smaller the niche is [1].

Delegates agreed that 'niche' is good. The more focused the subject of a blog is, the more targeted the market will be for any DMO or travel provider working with that blogger.

Nevertheless, one DMO senior executive who is wellexperienced at working with bloggers said that big numbers (of followers/friends/visitors) are important. Not for him, but for his stakeholders and directors who are more easily impressed by big numbers and will happily support a project proposal that involves bloggers with serious stats.

It was suggested that a tool like [onlineROIcalculator.com](http://onlineROIcalculator.com) can help to demonstrate the value of a particular high or low-traffic blogger in cash terms (AVEs Advertising Value Equivalents) to 'old school' colleagues.

Many travel PRs and DMOs who work with bloggers understand social media stats, and it is important that they do because it is easy to be misled.

For example, a blog with high traffic might have gained it from just a few select articles that went viral, while the rest achieve poor levels.

Delegates agreed that, whether big or small, it is important that bloggers provide their detailed uptodate stats (preferably in the form of a 'media pack') for the industry to inspect.

These should include not just blog stats but all related social media stats Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, etc and, where possible, the demographic breakdown of those stats.

PRs and DMOs should not just take a blogger's statistics at face value. It is possible to 'game' some indices and old data may hide a more recent decline, eg. if the monthly unique visitors were 15,000 six months ago, how do you know they are not 9,000 now?



There are numerous wellknown tools that can be used to help confirm a blogger's stats and influence such as *Compete*, *Alexa*, *Klout*, *Kred* & *PeerIndex*, and some lesswell known, such as *Fakers.statuspeople* that can show fake Twitter followers.

### **Longevity & Consistency**

Delegates discussed ways to identify the reliability of a blogger, in order to facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation in the longterm. As one industry delegate put it: "How am I guaranteed that this person does not back off and disappear, or get distracted by a new project and drop mine?" Delegates thought that a commitment to stick with projects could be included in a Code of Ethics.

They also noted that one way to judge whether a blogger is a professional or not, is to ask where they see themselves in a couple of years, in order to find out whether there is any intention to stop travelling/writing. (One delegate pointed out that staff & freelance work in traditional media is drying up so quickly that the chances of finding a traditional travel writer who knows he/she won't change jobs or profession in two years are slim, so you are probably better off with a pro blogger!).

Delegates also suggested that some indication of an existing track record helps to build confidence in a blogger's future commitment, although one industry delegate said his threshold was quite low on this; he wouldn't look at bloggers who had been blogging for less than 6 months, while the general view was that evidence of 12 months was a more reliable indication. Delegates also thought that consistency is an important signal. Is a blogger posting regularly and continuously, or are there bursts of activity when they are pitching for blog trips?

### **Quality & Personality**

Some PR and DMO delegates talked about the importance of high quality work, especially for bloggers who are photographers and videographers. They pointed out that it is increasingly necessary for marketers working online to have high quality images and video, so finding bloggers with good skills and perhaps their own unique 'style' or 'voice' is very useful because they are often cheaper, quicker and better than traditional commercial photographers.

The travel industry shouldn't expect to pay below commercial rates not least because (as also discussed in Topic 4 The Business of Blogging) delegates recognised the need to establish serious commercial relationships with pro bloggers as the norm, to ensure they earn enough to remain professional but licensing terms can be bundled up within the project/trip agreement, and often the blogger will become a longterm brand ambassador and continue to produce photographic/video content and/or be more flexible over the arrangements for how that content is used.



Quality & personality are not exclusively important for video/photo bloggers. One PR delegate talked about a client who had insisted on a particular blogger solely because they liked the blogger's high quality writing.

And 'personality' as a criterion doesn't need to be restricted to content. One experienced blog trip organiser says her final test is: "Will I enjoy working with this blogger? Will they be fun and get on with other bloggers and my clients?"

### Care

Delegates agreed that selecting the best bloggers for a project is a process that needs careful thought and plenty of time. Some parts of the PR industry are still in legacy mode, where traditional press trips might be organised on the spur of the moment when a client gives the nod, but the relationship with bloggers is more personal, more complex, and longer lasting. The risks of getting it wrong can be more significant. If a travel/tourism organisation selects a bad blogger (eg. unprofessional attitude, unbelievable demands, late or nonexistent content, inflated numbers/influence, etc.) it sours their experience and taints the problogger market. If it is their first experience of working with bloggers, it might put them off altogether.

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### Delegates summarised their thoughts in a list of Top Ten Tips for choosing a blogger to work with on a fam trip/sponsored trip or campaign:

- 1.** Read their blog One PR delegate described how a client rejected the 'big numbers' blogger they had proposed to work with, in favour of a blogger whose writing they liked. "They wanted to be able to show off a 'quality piece' about their hotel".
- 2.** Consider their demographics are readers mostly budget/luxury, male/female, family/solo, etc.
- 3.** Distribution consider what social media platforms they work on, including... do they write for print publications, do they talk about destinations at conferences, etc.
- 4.** Qualify their engagement how much do they engage with their readers in comments or on social media. One recommendation was to ask the blogger about their engagement because there may be unseen conversations in emails
- 5.** Negative Review Policy What happens if something goes wrong or the blogger doesn't like the destination/product. Some bloggers will just write a bad review, others will not write anything, others will contact the PR or company first to see if there are ameliorating circumstances.



6. Agree the Outcomes What you want from it in terms of Return on Investment (ROI); more brand awareness, website visitors, social media followers, content, family bookings, more Germanspeaking visitors?
7. Check limitations/boundaries Does this blogger simply not do food reviews or secret buyer reviews, or won't speak in front of a camera?
8. Agree Content Share/Ownership How many posts/photos/videos? Who can use them? How can they be used?
9. Credibility Check Do a third party check of their credibility, Google, Klout, other DMOs/PRs they've worked with. Some statistics, like Twitter followers, can be 'farmed'.
10. Consider the project Does this project fit with your overall campaign strategy? Does it fit with the blogger's brand? Is this a one-off?



Think Tank participants were drawn into thought-provoking discussions



## Topic 4 The Business of Blogging

For many, blogging is a business. Bloggers are publishers. Should they always be paid? What should they be paid for? Are they worth it? How does the industry evaluate ROI? Are blogger marketing groups an efficient way to work with bloggers? Should there always be a formal contract? What should be specified in a contract or working agreement?

Topic Leader: Matt Long (Blog: [Landlopers](#))

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The growth of blogging fundamentally changed the relationship between travel writers and the travel/tourism industry to such an extent that, at first, neither party really understood how it might work. So both parties have been finding their way and developing protocols from scratch as they go.

The transition from writers being paid by publishers to writers being publishers has been made more complex by the wide diversity of ambition on the blogger side. Many bloggers have been happy to travel and write without much thought about making a living, and have been delighted to find the industry taking any interest in them at all.

Meanwhile, the vanguard of professional bloggers have been looking at increasingly creative forms of monetisation since it became quickly clear that advertising and affiliation schemes alone would not generate a proper income.

To further muddy the waters, sitting between the "amateur" and "pro" bloggers is another group: [semi-pro bloggers](#), who combine income from blogging with part-time employment or other freelance work such as copywriting, social media marketing, programming/IT, or even daytrading.



Around 2010, the idea began to surface in travel blogger conferences that DMOs and travel providers might have to pay to attract the best bloggers to their destinations a seismic shift for traditional travel media who were appalled at the implications for editorial balance (see Topic #2).

Initially this resulted in a crude **stipend** system DMOs simply paid bloggers \$xxx a day to be on a fam trip. Since then the arrangements have become more sophisticated.

In particular, probloggers have begun to organise themselves into marketing cooperatives and work with travel companies and DMOs to create imaginative social media campaigns based on clear goals and measured results. It is a professional approach that the industry is happy to pay for, and now pro & semipro bloggers are beginning to pitch ideas individually using the same approach. This is the area that STS delegates focused on.

The question most often asked by new bloggers (with pro ambitions) is: "At what point can I start charging/expect to be paid?"

Delegates agreed that it is important for bloggers to work out their own value and this can only be done as they build up a body of work around which they can write up case studies, and generate statistics to demonstrate reach, engagement and influence. There are a number of tools to help them do this, including the STS organisers' own [onlineROIcalculator.com](http://onlineROIcalculator.com) which gives a cash value based on Advertising Value Equivalents (AVEs).

Many bloggers do not even know what their own CPE/CPM rates are for simple advertising on their blogs, so how are they able to judge what they should charge for social media campaigns and projects? They need to start calculating their own worth, put it to the test, and adjust as experience (or the market) dictates.

Delegates agreed that it is important for the industry to recognise that they don't have to pay a blogger (it depends on the blogger) but they should expect to.

Industry delegates used to paying bloggers for collaborations pointed out that, in the new world of selfpublishing, it can be selfdefeating not to pay. They recognised that bloggers and their blogs need to earn a living. If they fail, all the posts, videos and photographs from previous projects, lose reach and/or disappear if the blog is closed.

When industry and bloggers do work together on a commercial collaboration, then it is a 'business' deal and both parties need to be clear on exactly what is expected.



For example, if a blogger covers a particular event (eg. a festival) or niche topic (eg. best beaches) for/with a DMO, both parties need to agree what that will entail. How many beaches? How many blog posts? (Negative review policy/protocol see Topic #2) Should blog posts have 'factbox details'. How many social media posts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.? How many photos/videos and what are the copyright/licensing terms?

What support will be provided accommodation, car hire, wifi, food? And, importantly, what are the goals hashtag impressions on Pinterest, Twitter retweets, G+ shares, Facebook likes, visits to a dedicated landing page on the DMO website, clickthroughs from the bloggers site, bookings made using a dedicated voucher code, etc? Who is going to measure the results the DMO, the blogger, a third party or all three? How is an agreed charge to be paid lump sum on completion date, staged payments, pro rata?

Delegates recognised that it is very difficult to give any guidance on standard prices/fees, since projects and bloggers vary so much and there are market variations; rates will be different in Western Englishspeaking markets to German, LatinAmerican or Chinese.

Delegates also recognised that there is a biased perception of value on the Internet, for example, in display advertising. A travel company might pay \$60,000 for a full size ad printed in 100,000 magazines. Assuming every single copy was sold and every purchaser saw the ad, that would be \$600 for 1,000 views.

Online they would start complaining if the rate for a prominent 'skyscraper' or 'large rectangle' was more than \$1025 per 1,000 views (CPM)! An increasing number of travel & tourism industry organisations are beginning to recognise the value of social media marketing (some of them STS delegates), but many more need to follow in their footsteps and start to adjust their marketing strategies and reassign their budgets. The old days are not coming back. If anything they are receding more quickly (See Topic #5 The Future).

Delegates also discussed the issue of short-term/one-off relationships (See Topic #1 Bottlenecks). Industry delegates acknowledged that 'shorttermism' was inefficient for them if they are paying bloggers for collaborations.

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In conclusion, delegates came up with some tips for better business efficiency, for both bloggers and industry.



### For Bloggers:

Recognise that Brands and DMOs will have different expectations. They will want different things from you. Learn what those are.

Pitch creative campaigns with suitable outcomes eg. videos, photos, etc.

Research potential DMOs/travel providers to see what they need, eg. maybe there's a significant event coming up next year.

Improve your business skills and become more professional (learn to demonstrate your value, negotiate, communicate effectively and build relationships).

### For Industry:

Treat this as a business relationship with clear expectations and parameters. It's a contract.

Treat bloggers as small business owners. Understand that they need to generate income. Expect to pay. The idea that pro bloggers will do it for 'exposure' and free trips is a myth. It doesn't have to be huge sums of money; it can be small, but it does need to be there.

Internally engage the PR & marketing offices and create integrated blogger relationships.

Just because you can quantify something doesn't mean you should. Don't go crazy dotting every 'i' & crossing every 't' in a project. Allow space for some creativity to breathe.

### For Both:

Build long term relationships. It's easy to do and multiplies the effect of every collaboration.



Notes from the Think Tank



## Topic 5 The Future

The explosive growth of Mobile, Big Data, Sensors, GeoLocation, Social Media Apps, Disruptive Startups, Speech Recognition/Translation, and Wearable Computing, to mention just a few social & technological trends, is changing our working landscape rapidly. How will they affect the way we work in the next 5 years and which will be the most significant? 'Blue Sky' thinking welcome!

Topic Leader: Paul Dow (Blog: [TravMonkey](#))

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When mobile phone companies first developed SMS as a handy tool for their engineers<sup>1</sup> nobody imagined it would be seized on by the public and become a cornerstone of global communications with 0.38 billion texts sent every day<sup>2</sup> in the UK predicting the future is tricky!

The Think Tank delegates looked at two aspects of the future for travel media and the industry the technical and the operational.

Technically, the future is likely to be stimulated by tech developments and dominated by the way we and consumers use those developments.

Operationally, the future is likely to see further changes in the way travel media and industry organise themselves and work together.

Under those headings the delegates peered into their magic crystal ball, and came up with a list of ten predictions.

## Technical:

**1.** Video! Video! Video! Everyone agrees there is a dramatic shift underway towards video. In the short term there is going to be a rapid increase in the amount of video content created, coupled with an industry disrupting change in the way it will be distributed and consumed. Smart phones and goanywhere video cameras like the GoPro make it easy for everyone to produce video content and a new generation of videographers are already upon us. Soon, wearable cameras like Google Glass will be adding to the mass of niche subjects being filmed in shorter bursts and with less formality.

Those videos are already being consumed on tablets and 4G smartphones in huge quantities by a new generation of consumers who have grown up with social media, and who, with ondemand network devices like Xbox and Chromecast, don't use the TV to watch their favourite programmes.



1 The first text message was sent on 3rd Dec 1992

2 <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jan/13/numbertextmessagessentbritainfallsfirsttime>

**2.** Along with video, there will be an increased focus on visuals (photos, infographics, maps, animations etc), so it will be important to acquire the skills necessary to create, embed and use them.

**3.** More emphasis on hyperlocal content, which can be used with geolocation apps.

## Operational:

**1.** Already there has been a growth in bloggers collaborating on marketing (*iambassador, EcoAdventures, ReiseBlogger*) and publishing (*TravelDudes, Matador*).

That growth will continue and merge as more bloggers collaborate over content creation (pooling skills needed for Topic #2 above), resulting in the development of combined publishing & marketing houses, ironically bringing the business model full circle back to where it was with bloggers on the 'staff'.

**2.** At the same time bloggers will encounter increased competition from traditional journalists<sup>3</sup> who are now being trained and becoming more multiskilled in order to keep ahead. The technical differences between many freelance journalists and bloggers are already insignificant. More significantly, they will also face increased competition from niche influencers, eg. chefs, musicians, mummy bloggers, artists, celebrities, gamers, or gardeners. These influencers are already using social media to reach their audiences and are becoming more attractive to marketers.

**3.** The division between pro and non-pro bloggers will expand as probloggers become increasingly adept at using new technologies & platforms and at finding new commercial opportunities.



**3.1.** Non-pro bloggers will continue to focus primarily on their blogs, where pro-bloggers will expand their activities so that their blog remains the 'home address' for the brand, but they concentrate their activities where they are most influential eg. on existing networks like G+, Instagram, Pinterest, but especially on video, on geolocation networks, and on new publishing networks.

**3.2.** Some bloggers will shift to a more commercial travel agency role selling travel products related to their content.

**4.** Fam trips will become more business-like; more focused on niche content, specific campaign goals, and particular market segments.

**5.** It will be increasingly important for bloggers to develop a unique 'voice' in order to be heard in a crowded market



3 Such was the suspicion and hostility between traditional media and bloggers four years ago it was impossible to combine them on a group press trip. Now it is rare for them not to be combined.

### 3 Summary

It is clear that there were various repeating themes across the topics during the course of the Think Tank Sessions. The need for bloggers to become more businessminded came up often, and with that, the need for bloggers to produce a detailed media pack with not just comprehensive audience/readership statistics, but also with clear policies on transparency, negative reviews and editorial boundaries.

The need for the industry to learn more about the way bloggers work, to recognise them as publishers and treat them as small businesses, to be more diligent in researching which bloggers to work with, to be more detailed about expectations, and to engage with bloggers for longterm collaborations.

Both sides clearly need to learn more about each other and how they work.

Both sides also need to keep abreast of rapidly evolving technologies, disruptors, and the changing market. Video content is clearly becoming increasingly important and both industry and bloggers need to learn more about how to create, deploy and leverage it.



**One thing came up repeatedly in most of the topics: the need for a code of standards & ethics for travel bloggers.**

The delegates thought that many of the principles highlighted in the various topic discussions should be incorporated into a universal code that travel bloggers can link to, OR cut & paste and host locally on their blog in its entirety, OR tweak to suit their own style.

So, we decided to give it a go...



The Think Tank participants



listen intently as the format is explained



# The STS Code: Standards & Ethics for Professional Travel Bloggers

## As a professional travel blogger:

### 1. General

- a. I expect to be paid for my work not my opinion.
- b. I undertake to publish/deliver all content that I have agreed in a professional and timely manner.
- c. I will not falsely represent my online influence/statistics, or inflate my statistics by buying false readers, followers, fans etc.
- d. I will not falsely claim an expertise or skill that I do not have. (Eg. I will not claim to be a golf writer, cook, Spanishspeaker or art critic when I'm not.)
- e. My first loyalty is to my readers for whom my credibility and individuality is crucial.
- f. My standards apply not only to my own blog but also to my 'brand', across all social media platforms.

### 2. My Content

- a. I only write about experiences and discoveries on trips that I have actually made.
- b. I only write about my experiences subjectively and all opinions expressed are my own.
- c. I always clearly label any advertising, advertorials, sponsorships, competitions, product tests or 3rd party reviews, published by me and declare any commercial relationships or associations.
- d. I respect the copyright and moral rights of others.

### 3. As a Publisher

- a. I expect to work with companies, tourism organisations, public relations & advertisers/marketers, and I expect my readers to both understand and accept the commercial nature of that relationship.

- b. I will protect the editorial integrity of my content.
- c. I will always seek to agree clear objectives with commercial partners and make clear any limits of cooperation (Eg. subjects I will not write about or promote).
- d. My goal is to ensure that my influence and services are adequately rewarded.

#### 4. On Trips, Travel, and Support

- a. I view press trips/blogtrips/fam trips, group or solo trips, as an important and effective way to gather content and research destinations. They are not 'perks' but a necessary part of the job.
- b. I will not let my editorial independence be compromised because a trip is hosted.

#### However...

- i. I will seek to clarify in advance the expectations on both sides.
- ii. If discrepancies, complications or negative experiences occur in the course of a trip, I undertake to consult first with the host to clarify and, if possible, resolve the situation. In exceptional circumstances, if the situation cannot be resolved, I reserve the right not to write about the venue/trip/-experience and inform the host of the reasons why.

*"Acknowledgement: The STS Code draws on the previous work of [Reisebloggers Kollektiv](#) in their Kodex, with elements adapted to reflect the discussions at the STS Think Tank."*



## Lessons for the next Think Tank

The Think Tank worked very well for its first outing, but it quickly became clear that there were better ways to do it next time.

In particular, as the repeating themes indicated, our topics could have been merged into fewer topics discussed in longer sessions. Several delegates felt they were just getting into the thick of a topic when the session ended and they had to move to another one. At the next STS Think Tank, we'll have a maximum of three topics, or possibly just two.

We also had problems keeping track of the conversations with audio recorders on the tables. Next time we'll be better prepared.

On the plus side, we learned that having good Topic Leaders is crucial. They make the whole process productive and practical. On this note, we would like to thank our five Topic Leaders for their leadership and insights.





# Acknowledgements

## Participants

We would like to thank the following Think Tank participants for their time, enthusiasm, valuable insights and feedback:

### Topic Leaders:

**Rob Lloyd** - [Bottlenecks](#)

**Audrey Scott** - [Transparency, Ethics & Independence](#)

**Abigail King** - [Blogger Profile](#)

**Matt Long** - [The Business of Blogging](#)

**Paul Dow** - [The Future](#)

### Participants:

**Melvin Boecher** Publisher | **Sarah Lee** Blogger | **Ryan Levitt** Corporate | **Debbie Hindle** PR | **Peter Karimurio** Corporate | **InnaPerjitta** Lahti Blogger | **Elena Paschinger** Blogger | **Terry Lee** Blogger | **Jaume Marin** DMO | **Gemma Suner** DMO | **Nicolas Jammes** Corporate | **David Arcifa** Corporate | **Salvatore Canfora** Corporate | **Nicholas Montemaggi** DMO | **Steffi Gretschel** DMO | **Daniel Noll** Blogger | **Kash Bhattacharya** Blogger | **Rebecca Enright** Blogger | **Mario Cacciottolo** Blogger | **Simonetta Falvo** Blogger | **Julian Poole** Corporate | **William Price** DMO | **U Mei Teh** Blogger | **Claudia Saleh** Blogger | **Simon Lewis** Blogger

And last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to **Alastair McKenzie**, our Think Tank Moderator, for hosting and guiding the Think Tank session with great exuberance, and for compiling this report.



## STS Sponsors

### **German National Tourist Board**

The German National Tourist Board (GNTB) has its headquarters in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

It works on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) to represent Germany as a tourist destination and is funded by the Ministry in accordance with a decision taken by the German Bundestag. The GNTB develops and communicates strategies and products to promote Germany's positive image abroad as a tourist destination and to encourage tourists to visit the country. It has 30 agencies around the world to support its activities. Further information is available from our online press centre at: [www.germany.travel/presse](http://www.germany.travel/presse)

### **Leipzig Tourismus & Marketing**

Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing GmbH promotes Leipzig worldwide as a destination for leisure and business travel. Since June 2002 the "Leipziger Freiheit" bundles the activities of the city and location marketing in the half-a-million metropolis. Diversified as the theme of Leipzig itself are thereby the measures adopted in the marketing mix.

Visit: [www.leipzig.travel](http://www.leipzig.travel)

### **MSC Cruises**

MSC Cruises is the market leading cruise company in the Mediterranean, South Africa and Brazil and operates across the globe.

MSC Cruises sails throughout the year in the Mediterranean and in the Caribbean and offers a wide range of seasonal itineraries in Northern Europe, the Atlantic Ocean, the French Antilles, South America, Southern Africa, as well as Abu Dhabi and the Emirates. Its modern fleet comprises twelve ships: Fantasia-class MSC Preziosa, MSC Divina, MSC Splendida and MSC Fantasia; Musica-class MSC Magnifica, MSC Poesia, MSC Orchestra, and MSC Musica; Lirica-class MSC Sinfonia, MSC Armonia, MSC Opera and MSC Lirica. MSC Cruises is the only company in the world to receive the "7 Golden Pearls" award from the Bureau Veritas in recognition of its high level of quality management and environmental responsibility.

Visit: [http://www.msccruises.com/gl\\_en/select\\_your\\_country.aspx](http://www.msccruises.com/gl_en/select_your_country.aspx)

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Deutsche Bahn is the premier railway company in Germany, with nearly 5,5 million rail passengers every day.

Deutsche Bahn operates more than 30,000 train runs daily on its approximately 33,400 kilometer-long, modern rail network. Visit: [www.deutschebahn.com](http://www.deutschebahn.com)

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## Case Studies

### Blogville

iambassador and Emilia Romagna Tourism Board have organised Blogville - the now famous blogger apartment concept - for three straight years (campaign duration of 12 months in total). The content and exposure generated has been staggering. More than 150 bloggers from around the world have had the opportunity to travel around Emilia Romagna (and Lombardy in 2014). They have published more than 750 blog posts and 7,000+ photos/videos. These blog posts have attracted in excess of 1 million views. A customised Blogville microsite highlights every post that is published. In addition, a Blogville ebook (featuring the Art Cities of Emilia Romagna) has also been published and has so far received 16,000 downloads. The social media coverage has also been impressive: 205 million opportunities-to-see were generated, reaching more than 8 million social media accounts. BrandsEye.com has calculated an estimated advertising value of the Blogville campaigns of EUR 3.3 million.

### Puglia Roadshow

iambassador collaborated with the Puglia Tourism Board in the summer of 2014 to support the *#WeAreInPuglia* road show through six European cities. In each city, a Puglia village was built in a major square to create awareness about the attractions in Puglia. The general public was invited to participate in various activities in the village such as cooking and wine-tasting. Simultaneously, specially selected bloggers visited Puglia and broadcast their experiences live to the Puglia village, via a Google Hangout. While the public tasted wines at the Puglia village, an iambassador blogger would show them live what the winery looked like and interview the founders of the winery. This campaign, with its multiple Google Hangouts in six European cities, generated 121 million opportunities-to-see on social media and an advertising value of EUR 1.9 million (calculated by BrandsEye.com).

### Meet South Africa

iambassador partners with South African Tourism to create compelling content, organise blogger trips and provide training sessions to local bloggers and industry representatives. Watch the *#MeetSouthAfrica* 2014 case study video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxWVrL2PnOU>

### Visual story-telling

Video as a visual story-telling tool is becoming increasingly important in destination marketing. iambassador has a partnership with Story Travelers, a team of highly-talented visual story-tellers. In 2014, videos were produced for iambassador campaigns with the Canadian Tourism Commission, South African Tourism, Réunion Tourism and Jordan Tourism Board.

#LoveWinter in Quebec video: <https://vimeo.com/99019625>

#GoToReunion video: <https://vimeo.com/108775263>

For more information on iambassador, case studies and news, please visit: [www.iambassador.net](http://www.iambassador.net)



*Announcement from Traveledudes - STS Media Partner*

## **Traveledudes - The first Social Travel Platform**

Nowadays, social media is **Noise!**

It is becoming increasingly difficult to sift through the 'noise' to find content that is relevant. You have to be kind of a geek to understand the development of hashtags and it's not getting easier to find quality travel content on social media.

### **We changed that!**

Melvin Böcher, founder of Traveledudes and social media evangelist, thought it was time to use his experience and knowledge to bring travel guidebooks to the next level!

**Traveledudes is THE first Social Travel platform!** It provides the travel industry and bloggers free exposure through the smart use of hashtags. Traveledudes harnesses the power of hashtags by ensuring quality content is found easily. By utilising appropriate hashtags (such as #travel #London or #food #Madrid), online publishers can determine where their content is presented on the Traveledudes platform.

Users can look up content relevant to them in the Social Travel section of the platform or find tips contributed from the Traveledudes network in the Guidebook section.





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Travellers are able to follow a travel expert's profile or a specific keyword (e.g. "Bologna", or "Bologna"+"food") on the Traveldudes platform. In the traveller's timeline, posts will appear with the keywords he/she follows and posts shared by experts he/she follows.

The structure and layout is kept to a minimum to provide an optimal orientation, search and loading time of the site.

Publishers' content can be shown in prime positions in the Social Travel and in the Guidebook section. For more information, please [register](#) (for free), download the [media kit](#) or [contact us](#).



## Closing words

The Social Travel Summit is a milestone in the rapid evolution of travel blogging. Fueled by a passion for travel and sharing, many travel bloggers are increasingly seen as professionals who offer tremendous value.

Our objective was to take this level of professionalism up a few notches and establish a solid foundation for collaboration between the bloggers and the industry, and we wanted to do this in a casual environment that fosters relationship-building.

In this sense, with ample networking opportunities, music and dance, and quizzes, the Summit created a fun, positive atmosphere that resonated with the delegates.

The #STSLeipzig hashtag generated 82 million tweet impressions, reaching more than 4 million twitter accounts. On Instagram, more than 1,100 photos were uploaded with the hashtag (and the blog trip hashtags #welterbegermany and/or #germany25reunified). The #STSLeipzig hashtag was a trending topic on both days of the Summit!

Watch the official STS Leipzig video: [http://youtu.be/JQch\\_6zXH8](http://youtu.be/JQch_6zXH8)

The Summit would not have been possible without the support of the German National Tourist Board and Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing GmbH. "The first Social Travel Summit has been a resounding success in terms of both quality and quantity," said Petra Hedorfer, Chief Executive Officer of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB). "More than 100 international delegates discussed the future of content marketing in the travel industry and generated a high level of interest in the summit and in Germany as a travel destination on social media sites." Volker Bremer, Managing Director of Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing GmbH, added: "We are proud to have hosted such a successful and pioneering event. From a tourism perspective, Leipzig will benefit in the short and long term from the summit."

I would like to thank all bloggers, industry participants, speakers and sponsors for making STS Leipzig so special and I look forward to welcoming you at STS 2015!

Look out for our announcements on [www.thesocialtravelsummit.com](http://www.thesocialtravelsummit.com)

**Keith Jenkins**

CEO, [iambassador](#)

Publisher, [Velvet Escape](#)

# Thank You!



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