

The tweet smell of success

140 CHARACTERS:

Tweeters mean business

BY C.R. ROBERTS
 Staff writer

Tacoma tested the air of the Tweetosphere Tuesday evening as the Hotel Murano hosted more than 120 guests at the city's first major commercial tweet-up.

It was a big night for small talk – and for conversations that were allowed to exceed 140 characters.

For those who are unfamiliar: A tweet is a message sent on a website called Twitter. This tweet – comprising no more than 140 letters, numbers, spaces and such – is posted on one's Twitter page and sometimes read by people called followers. These followers might meet in person when invited to a tweet-up, which is a busy blind date peopled by an instant family formed via collective text messages.

It's all part of something called social media

And it turns out that Twitter, tweets and a tweet-up are good for business:

"It's fun if you can meet people face-to-face," said Dina Nishioka, spokeswoman for Provenance Hotels, the Portland-based owners of the Murano.

"This is great for tweeters who have never been in the hotel," she said. "This also helps strengthen our customer relationships, provide more awareness and partner with local groups."

INSTANT COMMUNICATION

John McPhee, a senior account executive with Anvil Media in Portland, has helped lead Provenance into social media.

"Two years ago, more or less, I got Provenance on Facebook and Twitter," he said. "It was a good opportunity for them to start listening."

"I think it's another avenue to reach another audience we couldn't reach any other way," said Nishioka. "It's an instant way to communicate, and easier than e-mail."

Tastier, too

Among the hors d'oeuvres Tuesday were truffled macaroni and cheese, mini-burgers and the Murano's signature poutine – an amalgam of french



DEAN J. KOEPLER/Staff photograph

Linda Pollard, Cindy Wallace and Peggy Hawkes, from left, of Franciscan Medical Group enjoy food and martinis at the Hotel Murano's first tweet-up event Tuesday evening in Tacoma.

fries, cheese curds and a tangy wine reduction sauce.

And the martinis were 25 cents at the Lobby bar.

Nishioka said she can track the value of tweets by offering a 15 percent discount to guests who arrive thanks to Twitter. Her tweets also list special rates and last-minute deals.

"It's getting more common in the industry," McPhee said.

Hotels are not the only industry to find value in tweets.

"I'm trying to get them to understand there are opportunities," McPhee said.

"Business-to-customer tweets are the most likely to succeed, he said. "Business-to-business, not so much."

Nishioka said she expects a presence on Twitter will help the Murano reach customers – and potential customers – who are "young, professional, 20-to-45, travelers, tech-savvy, educated."

"We've identified a new revenue stream. It's a steady increase," she said. "It's a free tool that has made us money."

'BLOW PEOPLE'S MINDS'

Elliott Pesut, one of Tuesday's tweet-up guests, manages social media for Alaska Airlines.

"Alaska started with Twitter in February 2009," he said. "We started by listening. Then when Mount Redoubt erupted, Twitter was the best way to keep people informed."

Today, the airline uses Twitter "to listen to how people respond to the brand. I can also listen to feedback in real time. Sometimes you can blow people's minds by giving them an immediate response."

Jen Joyce carries the title "Captain of Making It Happen" at Seattle's Hotel Max. She also is known as the hotel's social media manager.

"Social media? It's huge," she said

at Tuesday's soiree. "At the Max, we've totally built our brand around social media. People who have never heard of us can find us."

Meanwhile, blogger and video producer Topher Welsh of Rusty stopped in Tuesday evening for his first tweet-up.

He said he liked what he saw, the in the lobby amid scores of conversations – some of which, inevitably, were being held on keyboards and screens.

"It's cool," Welsh said. "I thought would be smaller. I'm meeting a lot of people. I'm putting a lot of faces with names."

"It's good for business and all that," Nishioka said. "But what makes me happy – everyone is meeting each other. They're going to remember they met at the Murano."

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