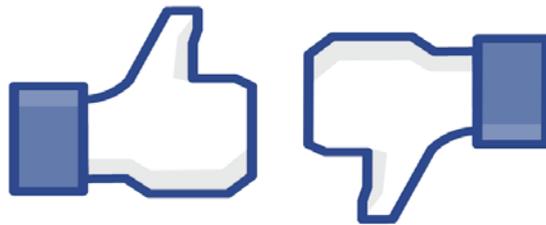


MAINE BIRDING TRAIL

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Facebook.

I don't know what to do with it, and I'm not alone. Since the Maine Birding Trail *Best Nests* program is an ecotourism partnership project, feel free to share your thoughts.

I may have condemned myself to an overloaded News Feed page on Facebook, but I just went ahead and "Liked" all of the current *Best Nests* who have a Facebook page. I'm looking forward to seeing how everyone uses it. At first glance, there are differences between innkeepers. Currently, I am partnering with 42 innkeepers around the state. Of these, 26 have a Facebook page, 14 do not. Of the 26 *Best Nests* innkeepers on Facebook, **Sebasco Harbor Resorts** is the champion of "Likes" with 2,572. **New England Outdoor Center** comes in at 2,106. Kudos also to **Pride Motel**, which is "Liked" by 1,493 and **Spencer Pond Camps**, which has garnered 1,487 "Likes" so far. These latter two are impressive because neither is a large operation.

Of course, "Likes" don't automatically translate into new customers and repeat business. There is plenty of online advice about social media and lots of consultants ready to consult. So I won't do that. Instead, I'll just offer up a little food for thought.

#1) From your own website, where does your Facebook link take you? When was the last time you clicked on it to doublecheck? Several *Best Nest* inns have their own Facebook pages, but the link goes to the corporate headquarter's page. That may be OK if the strategy is to boost the brand name rather than customer loyalty to the individual hotel. Occasionally, an innkeeper makes a change to the Facebook page but forgets to change the link on the inn's website. Doublecheck.

#2) Last month's *Best Nests* newsletter was about making your homepage visually compelling. The same applies to Facebook. Facebook allows you to use a killer photo for your "Cover." **The Brewster Inn** in Dexter features a stunning cover photo on its Facebook page. Meanwhile, three current *Best Nests* do not have a cover photo at the top of their pages.



Also, don't miss the chance to have other good photos near the top of the page. Only a dedicated fan will take the time to read a lot of postings and comments if those are most prominent at the top of the page.

#3) Promote, but don't nag. Nine years ago, I retired from my first career as a radio broadcaster. I still stay in touch with many of my fellow announcers. Recently, I started getting a ton of Facebook postings from two jocks at my former radio station. I commented: "Let me guess – your new corporate owners have just instituted a social media strategy that requires you to bond with your listeners by posting to Facebook constantly?" The reply was "yes." The problem is that they really didn't have anything interesting to post, yet were being required to come up with stuff, which was generally pretty uninteresting. Naturally, I lost interest. If this posting bombardment continues, I will be forced to unfriend my friends.

#4) Know who you are posting to. Are those who "Liked" your page more interested in the inn or the innkeeper? If the inn's Facebook page is intended to market occasional events and specials, the postings will look very different than if the innkeeper is posting to personal friends. In general, personal pages are for personal postings, inn pages are for marketing messages. It all depends on who you're talking to and why. In either case, a posting that contains good graphics is much more compelling than a posting without. Even a link to a web site (perhaps one of your own web site pages) will automatically attach a graphic to the posting.

#5) Social media is evolving rapidly. Stay alert to the trends. Users are starting to resist the many marketing messages that beset their News Feeds. They are unfriending and unliking. Facebook is responding by giving users more options about what and who appear on the user's page. Advertisers are responding with new apps and strategies to get their content targeted on social media. It's not dissimilar

to how spam filters evolved to combat junk e-mail, with spammers constantly trying to circumvent the filters. That's the stream your fish has to swim in.

#6) If you don't understand it, don't do it. In my radio career, I was a whiz at marketing through audio. I won state and national awards. But a 2-year-old with crayons is a more talented graphic artist than I am. Most marketing experts agree that social media is now a very important marketing tool. But it requires attention and effort. For those who find it incomprehensible, it can be a big time waster. When time is limited, it's better to pay attention to the inn and the guests and avoid getting flamed on TripAdvisor.



The image shows a Facebook post from the 'Maine Birding Trail' page. At the top is the Facebook navigation bar with the logo and a search bar. The main content is a photograph of a group of puffins on a rocky, mossy shore. In the bottom left corner of the post is a circular profile picture for 'Maine Birding Trail' featuring a stylized bird logo. Below the photo, the page name 'Maine Birding Trail' is displayed in bold blue text. To the right of the name are two buttons: 'Liked' and a settings icon.