

Discover Lehigh Valley

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Social Media Analysis

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## 1. Introduction

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Based on my observations over the course of the semester, I will be analyzing Discover Lehigh Valley's successful use of various social media platforms to promote the travel opportunities, tourist attractions, and special events going on in and around Lehigh Valley. I will link to specific examples from these platforms to illustrate their effective use of audience analysis and strategy. The analysis will be based on Meredith Singleton and Lisa Meloncon's prescribed steps for "moving into social media" found in their piece entitled *Social Media Primer for Technical Communicators*.

## 2. Company Overview

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Discover Lehigh Valley is the official destination marketing organization for the Lehigh Valley region of Pennsylvania and New Jersey—the 64th largest Metropolitan Statistical Area in the US, with a population of over 820,000<sup>[1]</sup>. Their goal is ultimately to "promote Lehigh Valley as a business and leisure travel destination... to make sure the whole planet knows about the area"<sup>[1.1]</sup>.

### 2.1 History and purpose

Discover Lehigh Valley (DLV) was founded exactly 30 years ago in 1984 and was originally known as the Lehigh Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau. At that time, the group was small and primarily used flyers and print ads in regional tourism publications. But as Lehigh Valley grew and became a bona fide tourism destination on the East Coast, a larger marketing team was required. With Dorney Park, Sands Casino, Sands Event Center, Cocoa Cola Park, PPL Center arena, at least seven four-year universities, several annual events including Musikfest, and bustling, historic city centers in Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton, DLV has a full plate of marketing and PR work that needs to be done. Their budget for 2014 is \$2.4 million, which is being used to help promote Lehigh Valley's burgeoning \$2 billion tourism industry in the form of events, publications, and social media<sup>[2]</sup>. [DiscoverLehighValley.com](http://DiscoverLehighValley.com) is the company's landing page where links to many of their social media platforms can be found, as well as blog posts and other information about the area.

### 2.2 Audience

DLV uses social media to "get their message out and to build a continuous connection with their various online audiences"<sup>[3]</sup>. The "various audiences" refers to the different groups of people who would be interested in the information DLV has to offer on their many platforms. On DLV's Facebook page, these demographic groups are specifically defined as either "long-time residents of the Lehigh Valley or [people] just visiting." In this way, DLV is primarily using a location-based demographic as its target audience. That being said, according to Facebook's public engagement insights, the most active audience members are 35-44 years old and live in Bethlehem, PA. DLV's demographics can be roughly divided into three categories.

- Coinciding with Facebook's engagement statistics, current residents of the Lehigh Valley are the first, and perhaps largest, demographic being targeted. They are the most likely to engage with DLV about local restaurants, bars, events, and random snapshots or anecdotes from around the area.
- The second demographic is out-of-town families or couples who are searching for information about *what* there is to do in Lehigh Valley and *how* to do it. They would be interested in local hotels, major tourist attractions, and ways to save money in the area. Although they may only become interested DLV's social media presence *after* visiting the area, [DiscoverLehighValley.com](http://DiscoverLehighValley.com) is catered for them with easily navigable tabs with topics like "Play," "Stay," "Eat," "Save," and "Discover."

- The third demographic is business-people looking to conduct meetings or other gatherings in the Lehigh Valley. Again, they will be primarily using [DiscoverLehighValley.com](http://DiscoverLehighValley.com), but may become interested in DLV's social media presence after they see business potential in the area.

Because of the sheer volume and variety of posts around the area, it's hard for DLV to target any one age group or gender—most posts can be appreciated by anyone who is at least somewhat familiar with the Lehigh Valley. However, there are certain posts seem to be better suited for older or younger people. For example, a [Facebook post](#) in the spring about a new “southern themed bar” in Bethlehem with a picture of a cocktail served in a mason jar is definitely aimed at a more mature crowd, while an [Instagram post](#) of local teens at the Color Run marathon is probably aimed at people of about the same age.

### 3. Current Social Media Platforms

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DLV is extremely active online and makes use of every nearly social media platform currently available. In DLV's 2014 Marketing Report, President Michael Stershic and Board Chairman Kurt Landes wrote that “DLV's web presence is aggressive and wide-ranging, while our social media efforts are targeted and producing excellent results... Our social media channels grow daily. We've never been stronger on Facebook and Twitter, and we stay ahead of the curve with new ways to engage potential visitors and locals”<sup>[3]</sup>. This section briefly discusses DLV's many social media platforms, loosely listed in descending order of popularity and usage.

#### 3.1 Facebook and Twitter

As with most organizations using social media, Facebook and Twitter make up DLV's core-marketing platforms. Their Facebook page has over 64,000 page likes, and their Twitter account has over 12,000 followers. Because DLV is a tourism-based organization, many (if not most) posts include a tag or link to third party accounts from around the area (see section 4.3). Both accounts post similar content multiple times throughout the day, including marketing local current events, marketing local restaurants or attractions, views and experiences from around the area, time-specific audience engagements (“What are you doing Halloween Night?”), and advertisement for DLV's own accounts (“If you follow Discover Lehigh Valley on Twitter, why not like us on Facebook, too?”).

#### 3.2 Instagram

Behind Facebook and Twitter, Instagram is DLV's third most popular social media platform with just over 4,500 followers. Like Facebook and Twitter, daily images are used to market current events, market local attractions and eateries, or to showcase random photo-worthy locations around the area (“Beautiful night out! #LehighValley”).

#### 3.3 YouTube

DLV's YouTube account is used to share “professional and candid videos that showcase attractions and events in Lehigh Valley.” The page has 328 subscribers and all videos fall into one of several playlists like “Lehigh Valley Insider,” “Tourism in a Minute,” “Live Like a Local,” and “Lehigh Valley Visions.” The videos are not usually about current events, so the account is not in sync with Twitter or Facebook.

#### 3.4 Pinterest

DLV's Pinterest account has 817 followers and uses visuals to highlight current events and features from around the area. Links are often provided to a relevant blog post on the DLV blog. Posts are not as frequent as

on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Boards include topics like “Holidays in the Valley,” “Neighborhood Eats,” “Tie the Knot in Lehigh Valley,” and “Deals and Discounts.”

### 3.5 Foodspotting

Foodspotting is a social media platform where users upload and geo-tag photos of their food (usually at restaurants) and comment on or like others’ posts. DLV has “Spotted” (uploaded) over 350 dishes from Lehigh Valley food establishments, and has created several “food guides” including “Fine Dining in Lehigh Valley,” “Lehigh Valley Wine Trail,” and “Favorite Sandwiches.”

### 3.6 Google+

Google+ posts are similar to DLV’s Pinterest account. They are visual, less frequent, and often link to DLV’s blog. DLV uses the “Circle” feature to connect with other local organizations that have Google+ (see section 4.3).

### 3.7 Flickr

DLV’s Flickr account is where most of the organization’s images reside. Instagram photos are automatically uploaded to the Flickr account, and hundreds of other photos are uploaded to albums created for events or locations in the Valley.

### 3.8 Foursquare

Although DLV has a Foursquare profile and links to it on their other social media platforms, it hasn’t been updated since March 2014. Nonetheless, DLV has posted 144 tips for locations around the area, and has just over 1,000 followers.

## 4. DLV and the Social Media Landscape

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The social media landscape is a vast online place with hundreds of platforms and ways to interact with audience members. A company must understand the complex “lay of the land” before they take on the many social medias available to them. In May 2014, social media guru Fred Cavazza wrote that “the wide ecosystem of online services” can be divided into four different uses: sharing, publishing, networking, and discussing<sup>[4]</sup>. This section examines DLV’s understanding of the social media landscape and its application of the four social media uses. While DLV excels in sharing and networking, their use of discussion is still small and their use of publishing may be drawing more company effort than it’s worth.

### 4.1 Sharing

Sharing is the primary function of DLV’s social media presence. To increase tourism around the area, DLV mostly uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest to share content with their audience. The organization is extremely successful in this category, high-volume and varying content from post to post keeps audience members interested. On Facebook for example, one post will be a feature about Allentown’s restaurant week, the next will be a link to a news article about Bacon Fest, and the next will be an advertisement for a hotel, etc. The same topic is usually posted to Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest at around the same time, creating repeat content for those who follow multiple accounts. Although this is strategic (see section 5), it can be redundant and bothersome to regularly check their social media accounts.

Photos posted on Instagram are usually original photos that coincide with the same topics on FB and Twitter. The photos don't function as marketing material like the posts on FB and Twitter. Instead, DLV's Instagram seems to be focused on merely sharing the photos to create a general "image" of the Lehigh Valley rather than placing a great emphasis on the event or location photographed. For example, rather than linking to information about Bacon Fest like on FB or Twitter, [an Instagram photo](#) from the event simply reads "It's time for Bacon Fest in Easton!"

Pinterest pins are much less frequent than FB, Twitter, or Instagram, but the content pinned is identical to the other platforms.

## 4.2 Publishing

DLV uses YouTube and Flickr to publish their truly original creations (videos and photos) that are beyond the scope of simple text/image posts on Facebook or Twitter. They are focused on multimedia content and act more as "libraries" of files rather than places to socialize with followers. Although neither DLV's Youtube or Flickr have a large number of followers, they are both frequently updated with DLV-specific content. This may be an unnecessary use of the company's efforts, however, since these platforms (particularly YouTube) are labor intensive but bring very little benefit to audience members (see section 6).

## 4.3 Networking

Networking is accomplished on many of the same social media sites used for sharing. On Twitter and Facebook, retweets and links to other accounts from around Lehigh Valley create a strong and noticeable network of Lehigh Valley businesses and organizations. On Google+, DLV makes use of the "circles" feature to literally create networks of local companies.

On Twitter, slightly less than half of all tweets are actually retweets from other accounts around the area. Original tweets composed by DLV almost always tweet "at" another organization. For example, one tweet on the DLV twitter page may be a [retweeted tweet](#) by @DutchSprings about their annual PEEPSfest, and [the next tweet](#) will be about craft beer tweeted @LVAlTrail.

Similarly, DLV's Facebook also networks with other organizations by tagging them in posts. For example, a [post](#) about springtime activities includes tags to Pocono Whitewater Rafting and Skirmish Paintball—both local businesses.

Of all the social media platforms, Google+ has the most literal form of networking with the circles feature. Many local companies and people have DLV included in their Google+ circles, including area malls, stores, and individuals who care about networking with them. The Lehigh Valley Zoo, Lehigh Valley IronPigs, and the local newspaper are examples of Google+ pages included in DLV's own circles.

## 4.4 Discussing

Foodspotting is DLV's most specific "nichework"—a very small group of people using a social media platform to discuss a specific topic or niche, in this case, food. While discussion does occur on other platforms (see section 7), Foodspotting allows for pointed and in-depth conversation about restaurants and dishes. For example, a [post](#) from Allentown Brew Works gives a detailed description of a German bratwurst dish—more detailed than would be appropriate on any other platform. On this [post](#), the restaurant owner commented that he changed the menu, along with three "Great shot!" ratings (similar to a like on Facebook). These food-specific discussions could not occur on other social media platforms since the competing content would bury them and they wouldn't get attention.

## 5. Strategy

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DLV clearly follows strict strategies to accomplish their goal of promoting Lehigh Valley as a business and leisure travel destination. As discussed previously, content is simultaneously posted to Facebook and Twitter, with Instagram, Pinterest, and Google+ occasionally included as well.

The timing of posts is extremely regular and predictable. Per day, there are approximately 10 tweets/retweets, six Facebook posts, and two to three Instagram posts. None of the other platforms post daily. All posts are published during waking hours—about 8am to 11pm. About 90 percent of all posts are clearly “queued” for posting in the future—there’s no way any organization like DLV could manually keep up with the volume and spread of content being created. For example, [this](#) Facebook post about Allentown’s Chocolate Fest was probably created and scheduled days, or even weeks, before the event. That being said, there *are* posts that must be “live” and could not have been pre-written. [This](#) tweet about the first snowfall of the season was obviously created at the time of being tweeted.

The voice of DLV is decidedly conversational, making use of both first- and second-person point of views. The accounts never say “I,” only “we” or “us.” This creates the feeling of teamwork and definitely shows a strong adherence to their strategy. Even replies to and interactions with audience members maintain the collective “we.” In [this reply](#) to my tweet, DLV responded as a team, even though it was obviously only one person responding.

The accounts don’t use social media “lingo” or any references to pop-culture, however they make heavy use of hashtags on Twitter and Instagram. Tweets about events in a specific city always include a related hashtag, for example “#bethlehempa” or “#allentownpa.” Many tweets include the “#lehighvalley.” Instagram posts always include “#iglehighvalley.”

## 6. Catering to Audience Preferences

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In Meredith Singleton and Lisa Meloncon’s *Social Media Primer*, the two suggest that technical communicators in an organization use social media to “meet the audience on their own turf. Taking this strategic approach will avoid putting time and energy into a social media tool users aren’t even attracted to”<sup>[5]</sup>. DLV’s primary platforms—Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—succeed in catering to their audience preferences. Audience members are clearly attracted to these platforms, spending their own personal time seeking out the platforms and interacting with them.

Unfortunately, DLV seems to be faltering in catering to their audience’s preferences for all other platforms. *Social Media Primers* says, “Implementing social media should enhance existing strategies, not draw resources from them.” In particular, DLV’s YouTube account is violating this suggestion. DLV is still posting high quality, professionally edited videos to the account regularly (about twice per week), despite most videos usually receiving less than 50 views in total. Although a few videos received a significant number of views ([this one](#) about Dorney Park has over 2000), others have a measly eight views like [this one](#) about the Lehigh Valley Zoo! At this rate, the videos are *not* enhancing DLV’s overall goal despite their consumption of resources and man-hours. As a business practice, continuing to create YouTube videos is a poor decision given DLV’s “tight budget” and desire “to do more with fewer marketing dollars”<sup>[3]</sup>.

DLV’s Google+, Pinterest, and Foodspotting accounts are experiencing the same problem as YouTube. None of these accounts have enough followers or activity to make them a valuable use of DLV’s time. Unlike YouTube, these platforms fortunately don’t require nearly as much effort to maintain, so DLV can probably continue to run them despite their faltering popularity.

## 7. Audience Interaction

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Audience interaction is important because social media isn't a place for simply pushing a company's message. "Users want to feel invested, they want two-way communication...they should connect with the company and fellow users"<sup>[5]</sup>. DLV is extremely successful in this. Whenever they're directly addressed, they respond 100% of the time, like in [this tweet](#) where someone asked DLV what there is to do in the area. DLV also actively partakes in people's conversations, making themselves personable and not "business-like." In [this tweet](#), DLV both responded to someone's comment about the Lehigh Valley *and* networked with an area business!

Facebook and Instagram function similarly. On Facebook, direct questions to the audience encourage their continued involvement with the page, like [this post](#) last New Year's eve asking what everyone is doing for midnight. On Instagram, photos are often borrowed from people using the "#lehighvalley" hashtag along with a thank you comment to the photo's owner, like on [this photo](#). This is a double audience interaction shows followers that DLV not only interacts with followers on their own pages, but they also peruse related hashtags and even explore the personal pages belonging to followers.

## 8. Evaluations and Adjustments

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It's hard to know what specific types of evaluations DLV uses to adjust and monitor the success of their social media platforms. Given the large number of followers and interactions, it's clear that DLV makes great use of analytic reports and metric data about their platforms. In [this tweet](#) I wrote to DLV, they confirmed that they closely watch data analytics for all their platforms. Data provided on most social media suites includes user locations, user demographics, most popular times of the day, most popular types of posts (photos, links, text), and many other metrics. This data can help DLV adjust their strategies for all platforms, keeping their web-presence strong and consistent.

For personal contact information, DLV has a "[Contact Us](#)" link clearly displayed on the front of their website. Additionally, they respond extremely quickly to question directed at them on social media, even on the weekend (personal experience)!

## 9. Conclusion

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Discover Lehigh Valley's web presence is extremely strong and successful. Although some of their platforms are not as popular as DLV would like them to be (YouTube, Foodspotting, Pinterest, and Google+), and some have gone by the wayside (Foursquare), Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are continually growing. Their adherence to a strategy is evident, and the team clearly works together to keep their accounts consistent, likable, and most importantly, informative. I genuinely look forward to seeing their posts in the future, and I plan on continuing to follow all accounts after this semester.



## 10. Resources

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[1] 2009 United States Census

<http://www.census.gov/popest/data/metro/totals/2009/files/CBSA-EST2009-alldata.csv>

[1.1] About Discover Lehigh Valley

<http://www.discoverlehighvalley.com/about-dlv/>

[2] Discover Lehigh Valley Turns 30

<http://www.lvb.com/article/20141026/LVB01/310239999/Discover-Lehigh-Valley-turns-30-at-full-throttle>

[3] Discover Lehigh Valley Annual Report: 2013

[http://www.discoverlehighvalley.com/files/DLV3784\\_annual-report\\_2013\\_web.pdf](http://www.discoverlehighvalley.com/files/DLV3784_annual-report_2013_web.pdf)

[4] Fred Cavazza's Social Media Landscape

<http://www.fredcavazza.net/2014/05/22/social-media-landscape-2014/>

[5] Social Media Primer

<http://udeng413sm.weebly.com/uploads/2/9/3/4/29349977/socialmediaprimer.pdf>