

Social Media for Servas Australia Some Options

From Peter Williams

For several months, I have been considering what advantages we, as a peace organisation, can make of what is now known as “social media”. It is far from being the only method of communication, but is certainly the primary method for an increasing number of people, especially younger people.

I believe that these are some of the outcomes we may achieve if we can use this in a respectful and thoughtful way.

- We can give Servas a more obvious presence on-line for younger travellers.
- Make the Servas choice more attractive to those who might be considering low cost travelling to visit other countries and emphasise how we are different to other “backpacking accommodation” services.
- We can improve the service we offer overseas visitors to Australia.
- Allow travellers to keep in touch with Servas after their trip is complete and to consider the possibility of being hosts later in life.
- Allow hosts to promote themselves and their locality (especially those hosts who don't have enough (or any) visitors.
- We can make Servas and its aims more visible to other peace organisations.
- Allow hosts to arrange get-togethers and share information.

So, what are the on-line applications that are available to us that would fit neatly with our aims and objectives? I considered You-tube, Facebook and Instagram. These may not be familiar to you but are simple to use and are central to many organisations.

Servas Australia has a Facebook page and if you have not seen it, it is available on the internet at <https://www.facebook.com/servasaustralia>. You do not need to “logon” to see the information and pictures and videos that have been uploaded. There are also Facebook pages for

most Servas organisations across the globe. The ones I found most interesting are <http://www.servas.ch/en/> (Switzerland) <https://www.facebook.com/Servas.Sweden> and of course

<https://www.facebook.com/Servas.International/>
There is not much information about Servas on YouTube but I did find a useful introduction at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RU183FZ1VoE> posted by Sergey Kibitkin, from the Ukraine. I thought this was well made and relatively useful but it did focus on travel from the USA to Ukraine and, as such, does not cover all the benefits that we can offer or explain why Servas is different to other travel services such as Airbnb.

Instagram is a tool that allows personal photographs to be available on-line and as travellers (and hosts!) record their experiences through photographs I can see that this could be a way of capturing “the moment”.

So what Next?

I made certain recommendations to the Servas Board, and we will be spending some time discussing these at the meeting at Port Fairy before the AGM in April. Some of these suggestions are listed below:

- Consider the use of a Youtube video as a useful way of explaining Servas (by a link from our website and also from our Facebook page). We could use what is already there, but I think a better approach is to make our own and use short video clips that hosts could send in taken with other hosts or with travellers that encapsulate a truly “Servas” experience. We have excellent video editing experience among our members and this could be done very easily. I believe this is an excellent introduction for prospective travellers before they take the step of making an enquiry to our Travel Officers.
- We could set up private Facebook groups within Servas Australia. This would enable hosts in a regional area to engage with each other and arrange

- meetings etc. Of course, this would only work if there were enough hosts who wanted to operate in this way. Because they are private, hosts need to be invited to join – they are not open to all and sundry.
- If hosts wish to promote their region or facilities, they should have the opportunity to link to pictures or videos from their entry in the host “book”. We already do something similar at the state level. As said before who can resist clicking on a link? Once again, they may need assistance but we do have hosts who can provide this. Many travellers from overseas who receive the Australian host list PDF will have only a vague idea of what our country can offer outside of the principal tourist attractions (even with Lonely Planet). Our list is very large and I think that hosts with interesting links will have an advantage, especially in rural areas.
- We could promote Instagram as a way travellers can display and share their “Servas Experience” photos. Young travellers now take huge numbers of photos via their I-phone or I-pad as they travel and share these with their friends and parents.
- We should “like” on Facebook other peace organisations that have similar aims.
- There is also the possibility of tagging other peace organisations, but we would need to ask them first. It is probably useful to acknowledge that we share the same aims as they do, even if we do it in a different manner. It is worth remembering that members of (say) Amnesty International are more likely to choose to travel with Servas (and become Servas Hosts) than the average traveller.
- We should consider the promotion of YouTube videos that fit with our aims as a Peace Organisation. Two examples are Malala Yousafzai’s speech <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOq>

[lotJrFVM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXhpK_lhon.A), Ted Talk on the Nobel Peace Prize. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXhpK_lhon.A. We can post links to these on Facebook, but advertising the same via the Newsletter would be useful to those members who do not use social media (both hosts and travellers).

- The above could be part of a regular “social media” column. We could ask hosts to submit details to make sure it is active. At the same time we could include a “how to use Facebook” guide, spread over several issues.
- Finally, I have another suggestion for our newsletter. I am a reader of the Guardian Weekly and each issue has a section called “good to meet you”. This uses submissions from readers from all over the world, who explain how they first came to read the Guardian Weekly (usually ex-pats who lived in a third world country) and why they subscribed and what they like about the newspaper. We could do something similar, asking hosts to give a small history of their involvement with Servas (how they first came to be hosts, what it means to them and what makes it attractive).

These are just my suggestions and I would like this newsletter item to start a debate as to what is useful, achievable and would have the backing of our members.

Have you say by sending comments to the Servas Secretary at secretary@servas.org.au for consideration at the Port Fairy workshop.

*Peter Williams
Melbourne host and former Travel Officer*