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Auckland Airport first airport in world to partner with Weibo in travel

First airport in the world and first business in Australasia to partner with Weibo

Auckland Airport establishes leading partnerships with Chinese digital giant for promoting NZ Tourism & Trade

Auckland Airport has announced it is partnering with China's leading social media website Sina Weibo through its new digital programs in China, including the use of content from its luxury tourism website www.xindaohualv.com and new independent traveller site www.xinxilanlvcheng.com, allowing New Zealand tourism related businesses and air services to be marketed to an audience of over 500 million.

Part of Auckland Airport's broader Ambition 2020 programme to grow New Zealand's share from high growth markets, the partnership with Weibo aims to attract more Chinese visitors – currently the fastest growing tourism market for New Zealand. Sina Weibo is a micro-blog, described as a hybrid of Twitter and Facebook, and one of the most popular sites in China, with a similar market penetration to that of Twitter in the USA.

Adrian Littlewood, Auckland Airport's Chief Executive, says he is expecting great results from the Weibo partnership. "Our reach in China through innovative digital marketing will be significantly enhanced with the Sina Weibo partnership. As China's largest social media site, with a staggering 500 million users of all ages and almost 50 million using the service daily, Weibo is the perfect place to launch our application designed to sell and promote travel. Users will be able to learn about destinations, have access to special travel deals and share their holiday experiences with friends and family," says Mr Littlewood.

Sina Weibo's General Manager of Weibo Marketing Strategy, Ken Hong says, "Not only are over 500 million consumers using Sina Weibo, over 200,000 companies have also registered their enterprise Weibo accounts to communicate with their target audience. With the massive user base and the rich social features, brands are able to reach many consumers very quickly. Sina Weibo has developed many different products on the platform that enable brands to accomplish a wide range of marketing and business goals such as branding, social customer relationship management, lead generation, social commerce, customer services and more."

"Since Sina Weibo is one of the best social networking site platforms in China covering the affluent consumer segment, and with these consumers increasingly using social media for making purchase decisions including travel, it is a perfect channel to reach, educate, engage, and convert them into travellers to destinations like New Zealand."

"China's affluent segment is growing extremely rapidly and outbound travellers are increasingly looking for destinations that provide a high-quality travel experience. We need to provide them with information about New Zealand in a way that is relevant and meaningful to them," says Mr Hong.

The Weibo partnership also forms part of Auckland Airport's innovative digital and influencer marketing strategy which is aimed at driving growth of targeted Chinese visitors through partnerships between China and the NZ industry. Over the last year, Auckland Airport has implemented a range of initiatives in the digital marketing space including large scale social media programmes, linked back to travel agents, NZ tourism operators, airlines and the travel websites, to help the industry develop increased profile and penetration in market.

The websites are designed to grow greater Chinese arrivals to New Zealand and provide more information about New Zealand travel experiences, helping change pre-conceptions of what New Zealand can provide. Weibo, as the largest player in social media, provides us with a trusted influencer partnership with visitors all across China and gives NZ immediate scale in a huge market space. It also enables Auckland Airport to learn more about potential travellers and offer them the opportunity to buy tickets and individual tour packages to New Zealand.

A direct daily air service between China and New Zealand, launched in November 2011 by China Southern Airlines, has produced over 40 per cent year-on-year growth in Chinese holiday visitor numbers to New Zealand. New Zealand's economy has reaped the benefits of this daily service, with Chinese visitor spend an estimated \$522 million from June 2011 to June 2012 – an increase of 27 per cent from the previous year.

Glenn Wedlock, Auckland Airport's General Manager Aeronautical Commercial, says Auckland Airport is committed to continuing to invest heavily to promote New Zealand as a top travel destination within China.

"China is the largest e-commerce market in the world and recent research commissioned by the airport indicates a large influence in destination choice is coming from digital sources, of which Weibo is the largest player, so we want to develop a great win/win partnership here in the travel space. We must take leadership in this space if we want to compete for an enduring relationship with Chinese travellers. Over 20% of visitors from China knew very little of New Zealand before they arrived and over 60% tell us they only knew a little, so we know that by developing knowledge, awareness and connection through Weibo we can certainly lift the experience and attractiveness of NZ tourism products," says Mr Wedlock.

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