

## Online Travel Booking: What influences Consumers?

For today's time-poor consumers, booking a holiday can be a tough process. The age old question always fired at a new band, 'What are your influences?' is just as important when it comes to online travel customers.

### RESEARCH ASSISTANCE

Most people begin the holiday research process by searching for destination guides (typically through Google). Often, these in-depth guides either don't exist, or consumers don't realise that they exist, on major travel booking sites. By not offering this extra level of information, travel sites risk people leaving and finding this information elsewhere. Researching and booking a holiday is a very time-consuming process and competes with other work and household activities. People have limited time during lunch break and evenings, meaning they're likely to get frustrated if it takes too long to find the information that they require.

### WORD OF MOUTH AND REVIEWS

Recommendations from friends and family are an important source of information, as almost all consumers take these into account when booking. Travel providers could facilitate these types of recommendations by offering 'email a friend' buttons. This will make it easier for users to recommend and communicate the details of their holiday. Inevitably, user-generated content is also an important factor when it comes to online research and booking. Allow negative reviews and provide assurances that the reviews are written by actual holiday bookers.

### SPECIFIC CONSUMER CHALLENGES

Groups of friends holidaying together often disagree on destinations, and communication within the group can be poor. Travel websites could potentially link travel planning with social networking websites to enable these groups to better communicate. In contrast to this, the main concern of those travelling with children is making sure the holiday is child-friendly. Travel sites should make sure that information about child-friendly holidays and activities is easily accessible.

### SELL, SELL, SELL

There is a large, currently untapped, opportunity for travel sites to follow the lead of ecommerce sites and cross-sell travel-related products and services as part of the booking process. This could include clothes, accessories, cosmetics and weight loss products and services.

### OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

It's important for travel companies to do as much as they can to help users choose their holiday. Other ideas that could be implemented to this end include:

- \* Letting users create shortlists with different flight and hotel options, that can be accessed when visiting the site at a later time
- \* Providing 'a real breakdown' of prices to include all extras
- \* Allowing those booking group holidays to pay for their share of the booking directly to the booking site
- \* Aggregating and organising all trip information before and after booking (Tripit and Traveldek partly do this)
- \* Cross-selling relevant products and services after users have booked a holiday
- \* Integrating destination guides with booking sites so people can complete most of their research and booking tasks on the same site

What's ultimately at stake here is providing sufficient information to help influence travel decision. Whether this is an objective online destination guide or a suggested excursion complete with a review from a previous customer, the smallest gestures can make a huge difference.

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<http://www.travelindustrywire.com/article35096.html> or  
<http://www.usabilitynews.com/news/article5071.asp>

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Submitted by [Alexander Baxevanis](#)