

EyeforTravel San Francisco Summit 2017 Round-up



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Authors

Derek Walter,
Walter Media



About EyeForTravel

We bring together everyone in the travel industry, from small tech start-ups to international hotel brands, to form a community working towards a smarter and more connected travel industry.

Our mission is to be the place our industry goes to share knowledge and data so that travel and tech brands can work collaboratively to create the perfect experience for the modern traveler.

We do this through our network of global events, our digital content, and our knowledge hub - EyeForTravel On Demand.

Our Values

We believe the industry must focus on a business and distribution model that always puts the customer at the center and produces great products. However, to deliver an outstanding travel experience, the strength, skills, and resources of all partners in the value chain must be respected and understood.

At EyeForTravel we believe the industry can achieve this goal by focusing on a business model that combines customer insight with great product and, most importantly, places the traveler experience at its core.

At our core we aim to enable the above by valuing impartiality, independent thought, openness and cooperation. We hope that these qualities allow us to foster dialogue, guide business decisions, build partnerships and conduct thorough research directly with the industry.

These principles have guided us since 1997 and will continue to keep us at the forefront of the industry as a vibrant travel community for many more years to come.

Our Services

Our events are at the heart of EyeForTravel. These draw in experts from every part of the travel industry to give thought-provoking presentations and engage in discussions. It is our aim that every attendee takes back something new that can help their business to improve. This might be in the fields of consumer research, data insights, technological trends, or marketing and revenue management techniques.

Alongside this we provide our community with commentary, reports, white papers, webinars and other valuable expert-driven content. All of this can be accessed through one place - the On Demand subscription service.

We are always expanding the content we create, so please get in touch if you want to write an article for us, create a white paper or webinar, or feature in our podcast.

EyeForTravel in Numbers

- 70,000+ database contacts
- 2,500+ annual event attendees
- 100,000+ monthly online reach
- 1,000+ online conference presentations

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Forewords



Michael Mace, Vice President of Mobile Marketing, UserTesting.com

In the tech industry, there's always some hot new trend that everyone's reacting to, while at the same time some issues seem to come up over and over again. This year the new thing is Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning, which has finally moved from the lab to the real world. Meanwhile, the old thing is mobile. It's been a decade since Apple introduced the iPhone, and yet we as an industry are still struggling to figure out exactly how it does and doesn't fit with the desktop.

At the EyeForTravel San Francisco Summit I was struck by of these both trends. AI and machine learning were covered in several sessions, and unlike some recent tech trends that under-delivered, this one appears to be making real money for real companies right now.

It's important not to over-mystify AI. Although we call it artificial intelligence, it's not really intelligent at all. AI today is just very fast pattern-matching across large sets of data. It's excellent at finding subtle connections between bits of information. To make up a fake example, it can identify that people under age 25 and living in Idaho have a slightly higher likelihood of buying vacation packages to Oahu, Hawaii. AI doesn't ask why, it just notices the tendency and points it out to you.

When AI works right, it creates a feedback loop: you create marketing promotions based on its findings, and those promotions further stimulate demand. For example, you might start offering more Oahu promotions to people in Idaho, and develop that into a travel trend. So learning what AI can and can't do, and using it as a strategic tool, is extremely important. It's a lot more than just customizing emails.

If AI is about learning how to use a new tool, mobile seems to be about unlearning the mistaken assumptions we've made about it over the years: *No one wants to browse on a small screen! Mobile will never convert! Tablets will replace the personal computer!* Over time we're realizing that mobile is its own separate computing world, with its own unexpected strengths, weaknesses, and rules.

One of the new rules we're discovering is that people are massively distracted when using smartphones. In my presentation at this year's Summit I showed UserTesting videos in which mobile apps and websites fail because distracted people overlook very obvious onscreen information. When you design for mobile you have to expect people to miss key information and make obvious mistakes, far more often than they do on a personal computer. Your job is to detect and correct those mistakes for them. In this effort, the quiet distraction-free usability labs we use to test mobile experiences are actually a dangerous trap, because they artificially eliminate distraction.

Perhaps someday AI will become sophisticated enough to help detect those distractions for us. But we're currently years away from that, if it ever happens at all. In the meantime, there are a lot of great travel experiences we can create for our customers with these new and old tools, once we figure out how to take advantage of them.



Daniel Houghton, CEO, Lonely Planet

As CEO of one of the world's largest travel brands, I attend many conferences to learn from peers and share our experiences. It is fair to say that the most pervasive theme at every one of these events is how to survive the relentless charge of technological change. At Lonely Planet, we have been engaging with technological advances for many years, and at this year's EyeForTravel I was speaking on a panel entitled "*Master the Art of Tech Evolution in Travel to Win*", which is testimony to the industry's fascination with how businesses approach change.

While technological innovation dominates today's industry agenda, I don't believe it is a new phenomenon. I have the privilege of working at a brand that precedes the internet, but which is equally no stranger to technological change. It is the same principle of taking a simple idea and delivering it to your audience in the most effective way possible that was the foundation of Lonely Planet - Tony and Maureen Wheeler hand stapling a guidebook together is the same act of product innovation as our development team working on voice activated content delivery for devices, such as the Google Home.

This is what I believe to be the key to succeeding in today's rapidly changing and competitive marketplace; root your business in a solid idea that has genuine value to the consumer. Take a solid intention and then utilize technology. It should be seen as an enabler, rather than hazard. Just as many questioned how the guidebook industry would adapt in the age of the internet - a question that could have received a range of reactions from within Lonely Planet - we have embraced the possibilities that technology offers today's businesses.

Today, Lonely Planet publishes more books than it ever has, but also interacts with travelers in many, many other ways. From a 12 million strong social media community, to a brand new video platform, we have taken technology as an opportunity to continue to

do what we always have - bringing world class travel content to an engaged and curious audience.

So, what does this mean for others in the travel space? It's simple, don't get blinded by the technology phenomenon - it isn't actually any different from grappling with any other change in the industry. Simply, remember your purpose and what really matters to your consumer, and ground your decisions regarding technology on this solid foundation. At Lonely Planet; we ask ourselves how a new development will sit with our brand; essentially is it valuable to the traveler first and foremost.

In the same way that it took the calculator almost 100 years to be a mainstream piece of technology, sometimes it can be difficult to see how a new development can work with your existing business. A case in point, voice-activated technology has been a big focus of discussion in recent months. How will artificial intelligence impact our access to information? Will it change the way we ask questions? Or how we understand the world, based on the information that is served up? These answers will become apparent as the world embraces and evolves alongside technology; but being part of this conversation is the first step in understanding how change can be a good thing - as long as it serves a genuine purpose.

1

Introduction

The travel industry continues to be in a state of rapid digital disruption. Just when it seems that companies have been able to master the latest technology, trend, or set of new customer expectations, along comes something new.

The importance of mobile apps is a given, but the capabilities and value factors are constantly evolving. Travel-focused apps must stand out amidst app stores that are crammed with alternatives. The capabilities of Apple and Google's operating systems are constantly morphing, which means keeping up to avoid being left behind.

Additionally, a digital presence must be more than a mobile app and good graphics. Brands must grapple with how many resources to commit to staying ahead of the curve, or if efforts are better spent partnering with the many companies that have come to dominate the booking and travel experience landscape.

One of those potential partners is Google. The company has been both friend and foe to the travel industry, with tremendous tools and capabilities for enhancing a brand's web and mobile presence. Yet many travel companies are frustrated at how much control and information the company has acquired through its slow dominance of online travel search and tools.

As if the challenge of getting distribution right wasn't enough to worry about, travel brands will have to consider how technology will disrupt business in just the next few years. Artificial intelligence is already at play, with algorithms able to analyze data and nudge customers towards their travel decisions. There is considerable potential for travel companies to interact more deeply with customers and suit their needs, though the learning curve is quite high in many places.

Virtual and augmented reality are also around the corner, giving travel brands new opportunities for engaging travelers with an even more enriched experience.

While the future may sound daunting, there is much reason to be optimistic. The speakers at the Eye for Travel San Francisco Summit challenged attendees to seek out new innovations without neglecting the core values of customer service and a quality travel experience. If the traveler loves their trip then they'll return, even if there's some friction in the process. The joy of travel remains the goal, and it's one that is at the heart of the travel experience no matter how much the technological landscape changes.

What were the main topics?



Winning the Mobile Battle

1.1 A Mobile Universe

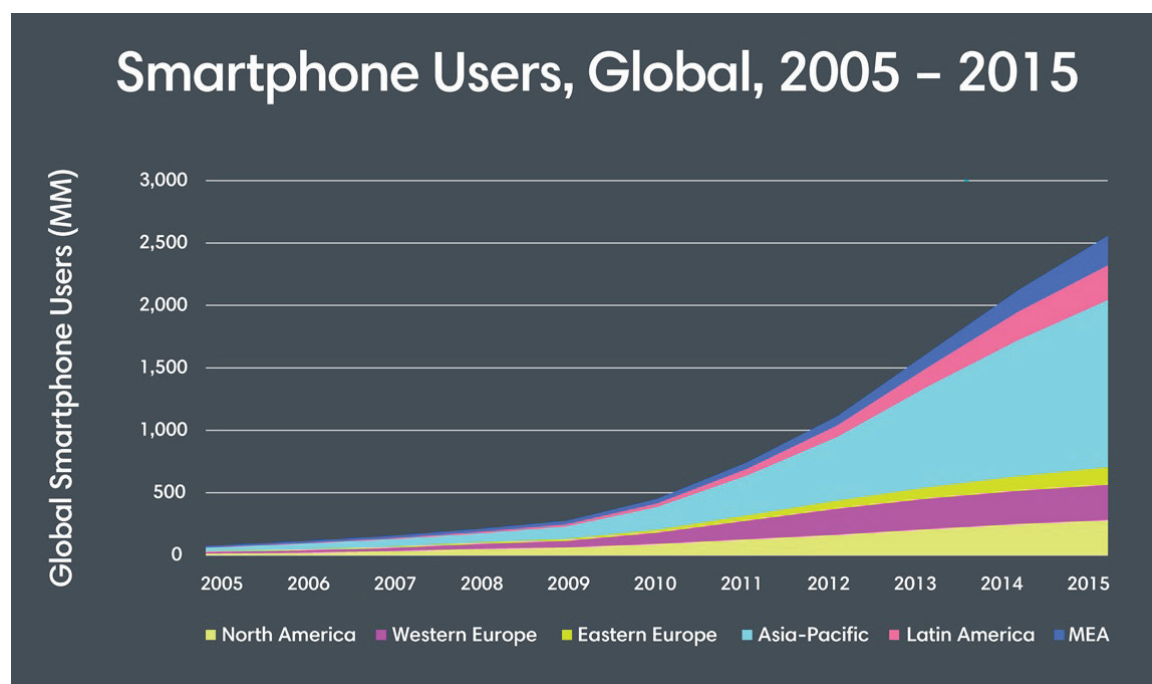
Even ten years after the launch of the iPhone, the travel industry still is grappling with the mobile revolution. Many of the keynote presentations at this year's San Francisco summit served as call to action for how the travel industry must adapt quickly and regularly given how rapid the digital transformation happens.

It is no longer enough to just have a mobile app or a responsive website. Users expect instant access to booking information, details about potential travel venues, and lots of insight from fellow travelers all from one or a handful of places.

Dan Christian, the chief digital officer of The Travel Corporation, emphasized that point by telling the crowd that staying relevant means understanding the expectations of the modern customer, particularly the growing segment of millennial travelers.

As the below chart demonstrates, the number of smartphone users has grown astronomically in the last ten years. Most notably, the Asia-Pacific region has seen a substantial amount of growth, which is a key segment for international travel brands.

For many brands, another constant question is what information to provide as part of the mobile experience.



Smartphone ownership has exploded over the last decade and continues to grow globally. Credit: PressReader.

Should a hotel or booking site rely solely on its own content for describing amenities and other features, or is it time to look for outside sources?

Christian described a 70/30 rule for such a dilemma. He said 70% of his content is user generated, aggregating as much as possible and finding where it fits in the best.

Within that “the key is to guide that conversation whenever possible,” he said. “Keep it organic, so you deal with all factors when you move it in that space. But you want to move it in a certain direction and encourage and incentivize certain behavior.”

For the other 30%, he said editorial content is still important. There’s a place for the wisdom of the crowd as well as in-house or freelance experts who can write about their experiences and enlighten the conversation.

One company that illustrated how to transition from an older technology base to a multi-screen world and distribute interesting content is Lonely Planet. CEO Daniel Houghton said the company, which began in the late 1970s and has become one of the top sources of travel advice due to its popular guidebooks, no longer sees itself solely as a publisher.

Instead, Lonely Planet has withstood the massive disruption that the publishing industry experienced over the last two decades by building up an impressive digital portfolio and investing in its mobile apps and website content.

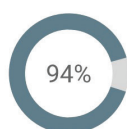
Getting to that point required a major rethink about how Lonely Planet would move forward. “We hadn’t done a lot of digital innovation, we hadn’t made any great digital products. We set off to really remake almost everything we were doing while trying to keep people loving the brand,” Houghton said.

That means thinking of travel content that retained the values of what people had always expected from Lonely Planet but in new ways. For example, Houghton held up his iPhone and noted that the company’s pocket-size books are nearly the same size. Even if the entire world isn’t digital, the impact of how customers interact with content has been dramatically influenced by the smartphone.

In other ways, this means going to wherever the customers may be. Lonely Planet was one of the original launch partners for Google Home, a competitor to the Amazon Echo that responds to voice commands



Planning & Booking involve multiple devices; app converts highest



leisure travelers who switch between devices as they plan or book a trip



Data: [ThinkWithGoogle](#), [Criteo](#)



Google is pushing app versions that are small enough to be downloaded instantly but still offer functionality. Google wants to increase app downloads as engagement and checkout rates are higher on apps than mobile web. Credit: Google Play and Criteo



and connects to third-party services through its digital assistant. It is unclear where this technology will lead, but it's the type of experimentation and willingness to see down the line that Houghton has urged other travel brands to embrace.

One intriguing alternative was offered that came from Google. Jeena James, global head of travel and local for Google Play, spoke about a recently added feature called [Android Instant Apps](#).

This tool allows a user to instantly download a light version of an app that performs one specific function, such as booking a hotel room or reserving a flight. A hotel, airline, or other travel app could create a native, application experience without kicking the user over to the Google Play Store for a download.

The proliferation of mobile apps has seen this friction as a potential downside for the customer experience. Users perform a web search and find a hotel or another booking they're interested in, but then must wait to download a mobile app. Yet the conversion rate is still much higher compared to the mobile web. Brands need users on their apps, but would benefit from a faster way to get them there.

"Instant Apps allow you to drive users into a native booking experience without requiring an installation. For the hospitality industry, we hope this will increase bookings by reducing the friction the industry is seeing on mobile today," James said.

"If people are searching for hotels, the Instant Apps allow companies the opportunity to provide customers with a wonderful app experience without requiring the user to download the app."

The Instant App experience, triggered by a URL, is built to offer what the user is looking for, such as viewing properties, choosing rooms, making the booking, completing the payment, or other essential steps. No visit to the Google Play Store is required and there is no waiting to download. The developer can offer the option to install at a later stage, but it's not a barrier to the initial experience.

James offered several key questions designers should be asking themselves to reduce the friction that frustrates users: "Will the experience drive engagement or is it transactional? What is the core action you want them to take when the experience is delivered to them

instantly? Now that you don't have to worry about installation, how does this change your re-engagement strategy? Can you add the ability to share links into your experience to build a social experience?"

While the Instant Apps initiative is in the early stages, it is illustrative of the dilemma that travel companies find themselves in when it comes to their digital presence. They're drowning in content and how to keep up with rapid digital innovation and user expectations.

Other experts concluded that this is why the customer experience is just as important as ever before.

1.2 Changing Customer Wants

Going from thinking about a trip to making the booking isn't a clear cut and simple route for the majority of consumers. This leaves travel companies struggling to track, keep up and optimize. Complexity in building an experience means that things are missed and the consumer can be left feeling frustrated by the experience. Travel brands are therefore racing to ease the journey and make it more pleasurable.

Attendees at the EyeForTravel conference were urged to maintain a philosophy of timeliness that fits in with the consumer's path. Ben Bates, the commercial excellence manager with Booking.com, said to focus on what specific values or amenities a destination can bring to the traveler. Sometimes they're simple and don't cost very much money.

"Our philosophy is simple – we keep the customer at the center of everything we do," he said. For example, they found that 80% of the domestic guests that Booking.com deal with are traveling to a venue by car. So, to stand out against competing establishments, it could well be worth emphasizing parking offerings.

Also, over half of mobile bookings are being made for the same or next day. With that information, hotel brands should think about what amenities would best appeal to 'one-and-done' travelers.

Other broad trends were also revealed about millennials. For example, when working as they travel many millennials prefer to be on their computer in a lobby of a hotel instead of in their own room. He said such

"isolated togetherness" impacts architectural design and what amenities a hotel should offer.

On the other hand, consumer wants and needs can also be fickle and hard to predict. It can be about reacting quickly to external shocks and changes. Christian noted that after the Brexit referendum, there was a major shift in Americans' travel behavior.

"The pound dropped and then all of a sudden, everyone wanted to go. How do you manage marketing around that? It's stop-start," he said.

He and other panelists argued that this is where it comes down to having a firm brand and mobile presence that can weather such changes. If you have an experience that customers love, they'll return.

1.3 – App Smart

Millennials love and rely on their apps, and hotel brands in particular need a good digital presence.

Brooks Martin, the senior director of mobile and digital guest experiences with Marriott International, offered some insight on this topic. He said Marriott focused on two concepts: innovation of the process and product.

At one point, it was determined that the Marriott mobile app just wasn't doing enough. They had

numerous requests from users to add in a bevy of features beyond just finding a Marriott hotel.

"In order to meet those increasing needs, we had to go from essentially a booking app to the world's best booking, door opening, points tracking ... app. We had to do everything: room control, finding the hotel, finding information around the hotel, etc." he said. "The question my team faced was how do you redesign a USD2 billion app?"

He said staying ahead of the curve has meant his design team rethought the processes for rapid iteration with the app. They release code up to ten times a day, and push updates to the App Store every two weeks.

"Even then, it's not fast enough. The team had to innovate the process and completely rethink prototyping," he said.

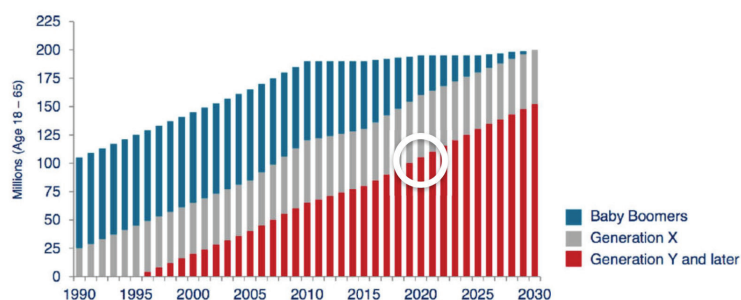
The work has paid off, however, as the Marriott app has served 20 million mobile check-ins, three out of five generation Y guests have a stronger impression of Marriott against competitors, and it has an above four-star rating in the App Store.

Another of the older hotel chains that has revamped for the digital era is Hilton. Dana Goldstein Shefsy, the director of digital product innovation for Hilton Worldwide, said Hilton has been aggressive in making its app an essential tool for visiting a Hilton hotel. In

WHY INNOVATE

Gen Y = More purchasing power in the next 10 years than any generation in history
2X more likely to travel vs. Boomers
Half of all travel purchases by 2020

Next-Gen Travelers
Competition/OTAs
Brand Preference at Risk



Marriott is looking to the future by constantly innovating with its app and trying to capture Generation Y, who are set to become the key travel consumers. Credit: Marriott Digital.

many Hilton properties it serves as your room key and is an access point to chat with Hilton representatives.

"The key was finding the traveler pain point, and eliminating it," she said. "It wasn't very fun to check into a hotel anymore, so we aimed at digitizing that. It all comes back to eliminating a traveler pain point. We've also recognized we're not always in the position to build it ourselves, so we're happy to partner with some of the best in the business to bring some of these things to life. We must do it at scale and in a digital form to make travel easier in some way."

2

AI, VR, and More from the Future of Travel

2.1 Interacting with Customers in New Ways

Anyone that has done an online booking recently may have spotted that popup notification at the bottom of the screen, offering to give assistance. It's a chatbot, and they're becoming more prevalent as travel brands deploy them to quickly and automatically assist customers.

Of course, with any type of automation there are going to be challenges with implementation. Stuart Greif, a senior executive for travel and hospitality transportation industry solutions with Microsoft, discussed the prevalence and advantages of deploying chatbots on a website or in a mobile app.

"Chatbots are already being implemented in a way that can better address large information needs quickly, available 24/7, 365 days a year," he said.

For Greif, when it comes to when to jump in and invest in new technology, for him "it's right now." The only "question is, what are you doing? So, data analytics – anything you can supercharge with machine learning – that will drive more revenue, a better experience, more personalization, reduced costs.... Bots you should be playing with, even if you're not going to spend a ton of money."

"Data analytics – anything you can supercharge with machine learning – that will drive more revenue, a better experience, more personalization, reduced costs"

Stuart Greif, Senior Executive for Travel and Hospitality Transportation Industry Solutions, Microsoft

Susan Black, the chief commercial officer for CIE Tours, urged the attendees to think of two key questions when it comes to evaluating such technology: "how soon and how much?" Marketers, distributors, and other roles in the industry must hedge their efforts on how quickly some innovations are going to make their way and impact spending decisions.

Matthias Keller, the chief scientist with Kayak, said there was some criticism that some brands implemented chatbots too quickly and created a confusing experience. But he said using the right design and their new prevalence has turned the corner with this tool.

"Now since we went through that phase and it's matured pretty much now and there is a whole ecosystem of companies that can get you on these platforms and implement the technology for you. I'd want to put it in next year's budget," he said.

Greif said chatbots are a prime example of when it makes sense for a company to partner with a large provider like Microsoft that has invested the time and research into services like artificial intelligence. Not every brand can build such platforms from scratch.

Even those companies going it alone and trying to build their own solutions may have to adopt this mindset with further technology that's coming down the line, especially as it grows in complexity and expense. Artificial intelligence and machine learning are concepts that are going to have to be on the minds of those who want to ensure their brand stands out.

2.2 The Question of AI and Machine Learning

Artificial intelligence sounds like a far-off concept, but it's already here. Companies like Microsoft, Google,

“We’re able to understand that traveler’s intent, offer the best recommended destination or hotel that they should consider and then back that up with evidence for why they should make that booking now.”

Rebecca Robinson, Director of Business Development, Wayblazer

Facebook, Apple, and others are using artificial intelligence to make their own products smarter and have infused their cloud services offerings with AI capabilities.

One component of this is machine learning, whereby computer systems can learn concepts over time and become steadily more capable at performing their analysis.

Rebecca Robinson, the director of business development for artificial intelligence company Wayblazer, said AI holds value with the trip planning experience, where the customer must journey through an “infinite rabbit hole to find that perfect place.”

She said travel planners on average spend over 30 hours and visit 38 different sites before making a booking. For planners, they’re lacking the background information as to why a customer arrived at a booking, or if there was a specific feature of a property they were after.

Machine learning can help improve this situation, she said. “We’re able to understand that traveler’s intent,

offer the best recommended destination or hotel that they should consider and then back that up with evidence for why they should make that booking now.”

For example, if a family was interested in a place with a pool or basketball court, it’d be advantages for the travel company to know those details. Such small, seemingly insignificant pieces of information can make the difference in securing a booking.

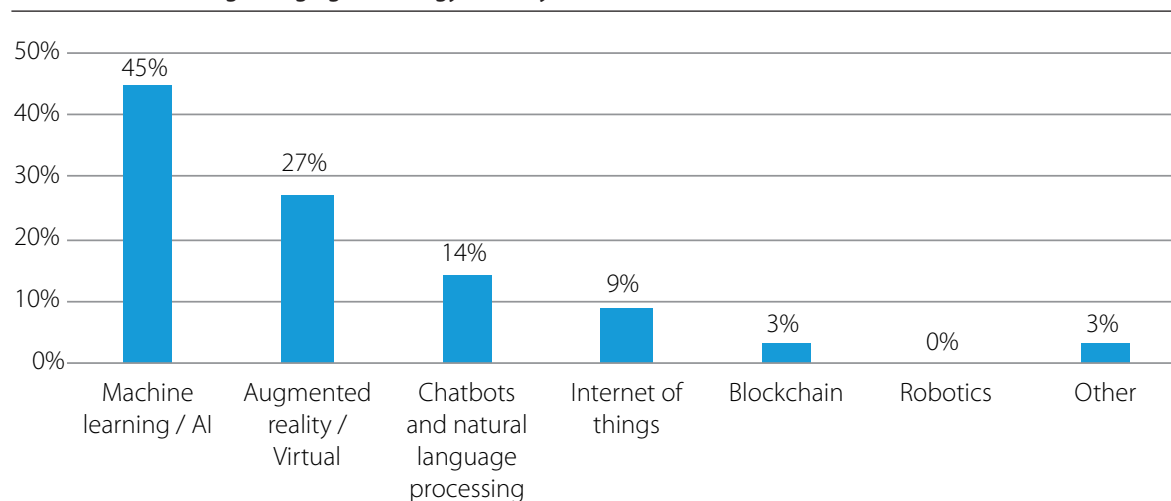
David Galante, the vice president of mobile product management for Emarsys, also offered a helpful perspective: “With our travel partners and customers, transactional emails, or an SMS are great for keeping the positive customer experience. But it’s the seat upgrades, room upgrades, spa experience before you get to the hotel – that is where we can really help our customers. Don’t just send out the transactional information, but also the upsells.”

If a platinum buyer has a propensity for spa treatments, then send content about that type of experience before their next hotel stay. Learning such traveler habits can be a valuable tool to more customize the experience even before they arrive at the property.

2.3 Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality Are on the Horizon

Virtual reality feels even more futuristic than AI. Although it is at an early stage currently, it’s growing in popularity and already is playing a role in the travel

Which of the following emerging technology excites you most?



experience ([click here to read our white paper on virtual reality](#)). The same goes for augmented reality, which may be less obtrusive than wearing a headset but nonetheless offers users a way to experience something they may not otherwise have been able to.

Michael Almerais, the head of global mobile virtual reality partnerships and strategy for Google, offered some tangible examples, such as using 360° video in platforms like Google Maps to show off the features at a property.

"360° video is a great way to get people dreaming about their next trip. Show them what the location will really feel like by transporting them there," he said.

"A VR concierge can drive demand for local areas, such as encouraging visitors to go on this hike, or check this spot out. Some hotels are dropping the hardware into the rooms themselves, giving the users a chance to play around with them. The same effect can be had in some airplane lounges, that let users try out the hardware and experiment. The best approach involves thinking about what you want for your business and how VR or AR can drive that for you. As an example, it could be a great way to show a wedding venue."

Augmented reality, on the other hand, is less invasive as you don't have to put on a headset. It's available in such technology as Google's Tango, which allows a phone to scan a room and augment what's seen with information on the screen.

While much of this isn't going to land directly on travel brands, Almerais suggested it's the type of technology that could be more mainstream one day. In the interim, companies still face tremendous challenges and importance in securing how their customers feel about their experiences.

"360° video is a great way to get people dreaming about their next trip. Show them what the location will really feel like by transporting them there,"

Michael Almerais, Head of Global Mobile Virtual Reality Partnerships and Strategy, Google

3

Focusing on Customer Love

3.1 What's the Way Forward?

There was considerable discussion at the San Francisco conference about how to handle various segments of the customer experience. Should companies build partnerships with giants like Google, or go their own way? And are tech giants about to muscle in and take business away from segments in the online travel landscape?

Those concepts were constantly peppered throughout a talk by Del Ross, a senior advisor with McKinsey and Company. He began by placing the role of Google in context – the company's travel revenues are already estimated to be bigger than the other major online travel players such as Priceline, Expedia and TripAdvisor.

"They are the biggest company in travel and digital travel today," he said. "They've been in the travel space for a while without even intending to be. Hotel price ads, they bought ITA for flight search, then they got into hotel bookings, flight search, destination guides, and Uber and Lyft are integrated into Google Maps," he said. "Are they doing it because they want to get in and take the business away from Uber and Lyft? No, they are interested in customers. They're relentless in closing those experiential gaps for consumers."

He said while companies have opportunities with integration, like Google Flights and hotel search, the industry is wary of Google taking over the booking process itself. Partnership is still important with Google services, he said, but the industry must always keep watch as to what the next moves are.

Adam Strong, the vice president of customer success for Apptimize, was blunter in his assessment.

"If you're just focused on features and fun, then Google is a threat. They'll build it and give it to everybody eventually," he said.

"If you're just focused on features and fun, then Google is a threat. They'll build it and give it to everybody eventually,"

Adam Strong, Vice President of Customer Success, Apptimize

3.2 Owning and Winning with the Data

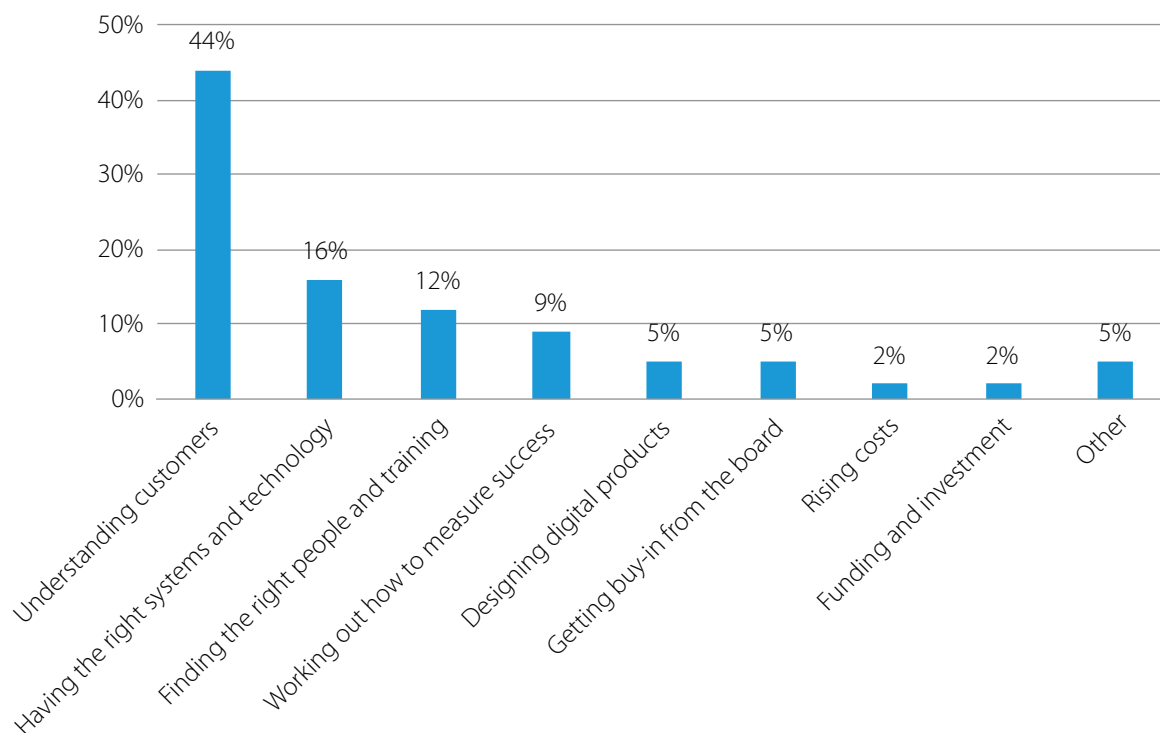
Google also has the crucial advantage of data at scale. It knows more about consumers than almost any other company and, crucially, it has the resources to manipulate and understand those volumes of data. Jose Murta, the global head of hospitality for Trivago, said the major challenge for travel companies is understanding volume, velocity, and variety of data a trio he called the "V-factor".

"The industry tends to look at the booking stage and overlook the fact that the most amount of data generated is in the inspiration and search stage. Not every traveler searching for a hotel room will then book," he said. He noted that Trivago splits their data for hotels into three pillars: guest, destination, and competitors.

Data that gives context is important for all of these, particularly for the destination component and analyzing the popularity of a venue. For example, a city that's hosting the Super Bowl is dramatically more popular compared to the Groundhog Day event when it comes to the bare numbers, with the former generating approximately one million visitors, compared to 40,000 for the latter. Contrary to the perceived wisdom, however, Murta pointed out that hotel rates for a night in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania for Groundhog Day were far higher – at USD450 – than for Houston during the 2017 Superbowl, where rooms averaged USD340.

"While in Houston Texas there are 7,000 hotels, in Punxsutawney there are three and a handful of bed and breakfasts," he pointed out, going further to note that

What's the Biggest Issue Facing Your Digital Strategy?



actually in this case “they underpriced it, as travellers were willing to pay even more.” The example demonstrates how travel brands need to take into account a wide variety of data sources to understand their market and create accurate projections.

Michael Mace, the vice president of product marketing for UserTesting, said examining user behavior is another type of underrepresented types of feedback travel brands might want to think about using more often.

For example, user testing is a common practice in software development and other household products to assess customer response. Yet it could have utility for travel, he said: “For travel, it’s critical that you have a complex experience in the real world, where people are hoping to have a magical experience,” but “very often it doesn’t work out that way. The idea was very magical but the experience ends up failing.” This is where user testing can come in to help with the nuts and bolts, “especially to mobile and especially to people using in the real world.” The key is to “understand the user’s real problem,” which is often not what one would expect as brands have not accounted for the way users interact in the real world – a world that is full of distractions. Examples given by Mace

included a journey where a user failed to spot that their chosen destination was closed and another where the user missed key information about ticketing. In both the information was present but because they were multi-tasking on mobile it was missed. By simply making these more prominent the brands can ease the consumer’s journey and make them more likely to complete their task and come back again.

“Your job is only really done when the user completes their journey,” said Mace.