

How OTAs can optimize conversions

across the customer journey



The experience is everything

Foreword

When it comes to buying travel products, customers today have a huge choice in where to search and book, whether that's through meta searches, OTAs, direct suppliers' websites—even social media channels.

With this ever-increasing level of choice comes a greater desire for personalization: products, services, and experiences created with the traveler's specific needs in mind. The travel brands who prioritize personalization are the ones who will attract more site visitors, capture more bookings, upsell more ancillaries, and increase their returning customers.

It is for this reason that we bring you this guide to optimizing conversions across the customer journey. Using our extensive knowledge and experience working with hundreds of OTAs globally, we present some tactics and technologies you can use to drive personalization and increase conversion for your agency at every step of the customer journey.

Throughout, you will discover some findings from the latest research we conducted with over 2,000 global end travelers who have used OTAs to search or book travel in the last year. Our goal was to find out travelers' motivations for using OTAs over other channels; what inspires them to make repeat bookings; and what they expect from OTAs at every stage of their journey.

To succeed, OTAs need to quickly embrace the trends and innovations that are driving the industry forward. I hope this guide helps to illuminate the road ahead as you build a conversion strategy that boosts bookings, revenue, and helps you stay ahead of the competition.



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Introduction

The battle for bookings among online travel brands is in full force. In an age where travelers have literally hundreds of choices to book a simple flight, the competition has never been more intense.

Every travel brand wants to capture that traveler's attention, bring them to their website, and convert them to a customer. Conversion rate is one of the most important KPIs that your brand is tracking and OTAs in particular spend significant portions of their marketing budget trying to turn lookers to bookers.

However, increasing bookings is just one KPI and shouldn't be the sole focus of your conversion optimization strategy. When it comes to searching and booking travel, people visit travel websites with many different intentions: looking for inspiration, comparing deals, researching in-trip activities (to name a few).

If your primary focus is solely on converting all of those website visitors to bookers, you're already falling behind the competition. Instead, you should look at the entire traveler journey map and pinpoint the areas where your agency can add value, engage with customers, and increase revenue opportunities beyond flight or hotel bookings.

The traveler journey

There are six critical stages to any traveler journey: inspiration, shopping, booking, pre-trip, in-trip, and post-trip. At every step, travelers will engage with travel brands for a range of services, and experience hundreds of touchpoints. A typical accommodation-purchase journey has 45 touchpoints alone¹—and that's just looking for somewhere to stay!

OTAs have opportunities to influence travelers' experiences and become invaluable travel partners to customers at every step of the journey. This guide looks at each stage to show how you can go beyond simply converting lookers to bookers, to opening up new revenue streams at multiple touchpoints.

By taking a full view of the traveler journey, you will see immense potential to grow conversions at every step. And the term 'conversions' doesn't just mean bookings; there are specific goals your OTA can achieve at each stage of the journey, for example: converting pageviews to trip searches, searches to bookings, bookings to ancillary attachments, and so on.

While each chapter presents some core strategies for optimizing conversion, this is not an exhaustive list of every tactic you should use. However, these are practical strategies that your business can implement to start attracting, converting, and delighting more customers at every stage of the journey.

There are six critical stages to any traveler journey—at every step, travelers will engage with travel brands for a range of services, and experience hundreds of touchpoints.



Inspiration



Shopping



Booking



Pre-trip

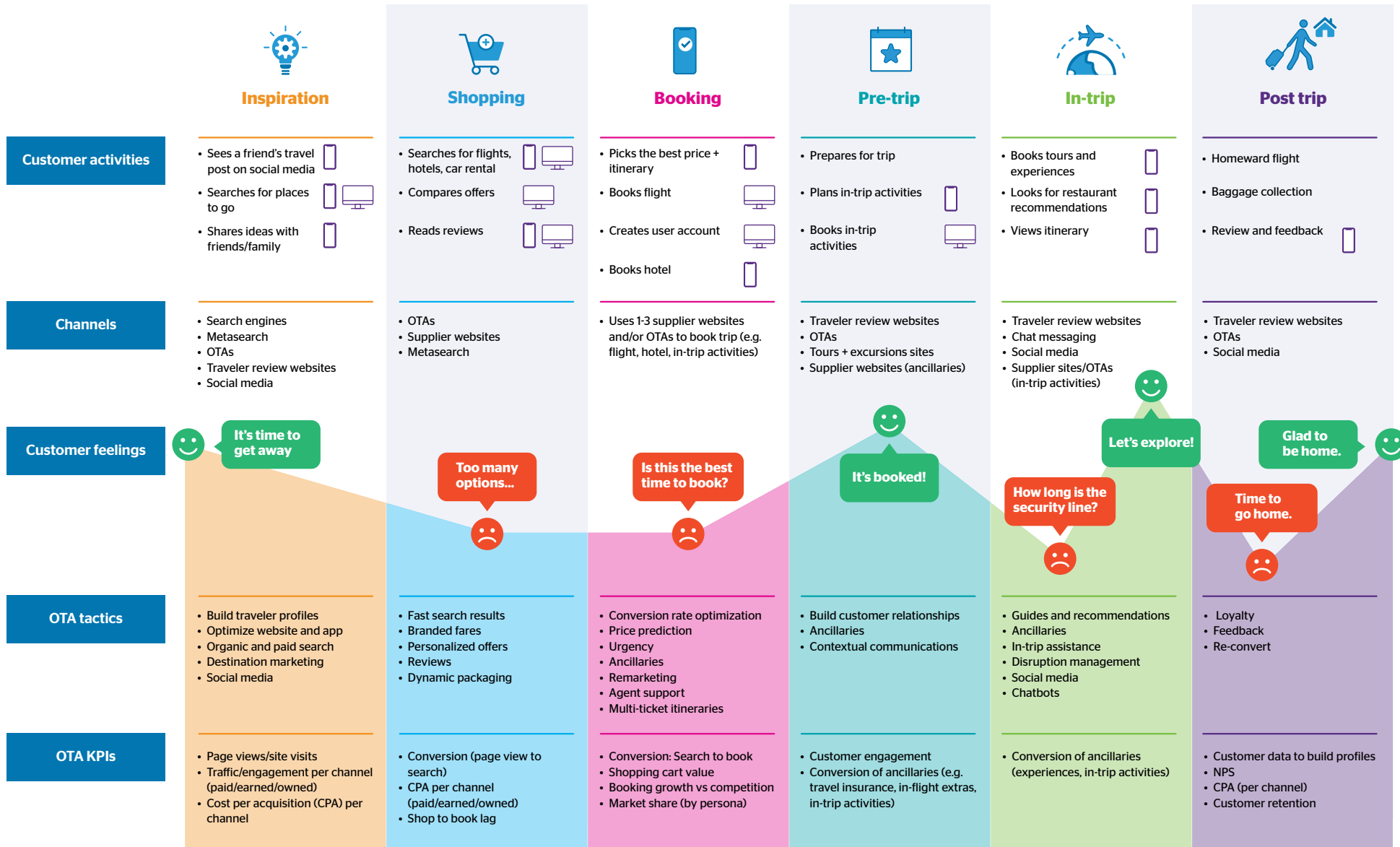


In-trip



Post-trip

Leisure traveler journey map



Inspiration



Inspiration

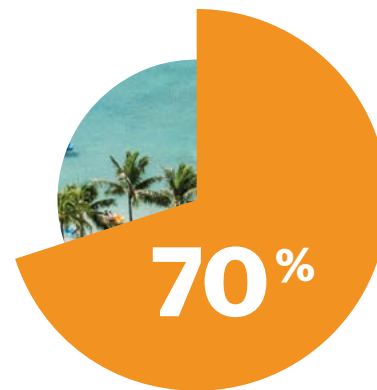
Whether it's for a city break or a safari, most leisure travelers start out on the journey the same way: looking for inspiration. While the decision to travel can sometimes be driven by a desire to see a particular destination, it can also come simply from the feeling of needing to get away, with travelers open to the idea of exploring their options—and exploring new travel brands.

Seventy-eight percent of leisure travelers haven't decided what airline they will travel with, and 82% haven't chosen the accommodation provider they will book with when they first start thinking about a trip². For OTAs, this spells one thing: opportunity. At this point of the journey, travelers are open-minded and eager to find an idea for their next trip, and you have the chance to influence their entire experience, putting your brand front-of-mind from the get-go.

However, there is also fierce competition when it comes to capturing travelers' attention at the inspiration stage. Our research with OTA end travelers shows that while 70% of respondents have used OTAs for travel inspiration in the last year, around half

also used search engines, meta search channels, and review sites like TripAdvisor. The landscape is also set to become even more competitive, as travel shoppers become increasingly savvy and inclined to shop around for the best deals.

Given this competitive landscape, how can your OTA ensure it wins customer attention at the inspiration phase of traveler journey? In this chapter, we'll show you a range of tactics you can use to inspire travelers and guide them towards booking their next trip with your OTA.



have used an online travel agency when looking for travel inspiration in the last year

- Page views and site visits
- Traffic/engagement per channel (paid/earned/owned)
- Cost per acquisition (CPA) per channel

KPIs



These tactics include

- * Building traveler profiles
- * Optimizing your website
- * Organic and paid search tactics
- * Destination marketing
- * Social media marketing

Some KPIs your OTA can track at this stage of the journey are page views and site visits, traffic and engagement across paid, earned, and owned channels, and cost per acquisition per channel. Of course, this is not an extensive list and there are multiple other KPIs that are relevant to your business at every stage of the journey.

How to optimize conversions at inspiration



Build traveler persona profiles

It's the first rule of marketing: know your audience. As consumers, we're looking for personalized experiences from every brand we interact with, and travel is no different.

Building customer persona profiles will allow your OTA to identify target customers, their preferences, and behaviors. By combining data from trusted sources, you can tap into what a specific traveler is looking for and provide information and offers based on that insight.

When building traveler profiles, data you should incorporate includes

- Booking history (e.g. lead time from booking to departure)
- Website activity (individual customer preferences)
- Demographics for typical website users
- Industry shopping trends

The good news for OTAs is that there is a wealth of data out there about traveler preferences and behaviors that will allow you to build comprehensive traveler profiles and really get to know your customers. The less good news, however, is that it can be difficult to know what to do with the volume of data available and how to turn it into actionable insights.

Advanced data analytics technologies can help. They give you a deeper understanding of your customers and allow you to enhance their experiences at all six stages of their travel journey. Not only that, they can also help you maximize lifetime customer revenue.

Throughout this guide, we will refer back to the traveler personas frequently, so be sure to make this your first step in your strategy to optimize conversions across the customer journey.



53%
of travelers use mobile messaging apps to share trip ideas with friends/family



32%
use social media for trip inspiration and planning

Traveler persona profiles

Example traveler persona profiles: Spanish international travelers

Source: Traveport MIDT

Backpacker

- * Low no. of passengers per trip
- * More complex trips: multiple destinations, transport types, accommodations
- * Lead time book to travel: 53+ days
- * High flight mileage
- * Average trip duration: 37 days



Weekender

- * Leaves between Thurs-Sat, returns before day 5
- * 1-2 people
- * Lead time book to travel: 45 days
- * Lower flight mileage
- * Average trip duration: 3.6 days



Corporate

- * Leaves Sunday, returns before weekend or travels within the week
- * 1 passenger
- * Lead time book to travel: 20 days
- * Average trip duration: 2.2 days



Leisure

- * 1-2 passengers per trip
- * Lead time book to travel: 39 days
- * Average flight mileage: 6,000
- * Average trip duration: 10.5 days



Family

- * 3-4 passengers
- * Lead time book to travel: 145+ days
- * More complex trips: Price conscious
- * Average trip duration: 14 days



Optimize your website

During the inspiration phase travelers are mostly looking for ideas, insights, and content that will allow them to make their decision on where to go, so you need to make sure your OTA is in the mix when they're doing this early research. Optimizing your website so that it is discoverable through search and useful for travelers at the inspiration stage is vital. These are the areas you should focus on as a priority.

A/B testing: At every stage of the journey, we present tactics that will help you to optimize conversion rates on your web and mobile channels. You should run A/B tests at every step to fully examine the adjustments you make and analyze what is or is not working; for example, call-to-action copy, button colors, page headlines and layouts, and so on.

Mobile-first optimization

Google reports that while travel searches happen on all devices, 60% of searches for destination information come from mobile devices³. So, when you are focusing on the inspiration phase of your customer journey, it should be with a mobile-first mindset.

The importance of having a mobile responsive website is nothing new, but it has never been more important to optimize for mobile-first SEO. In July 2018, Google made a speed update to its SEO algorithm and rolled out the 'mobile first' indexing it had been threatening for years⁴. Google's rankings now prioritize sites that are mobile-friendly or responsive, as well as sites that have a quick loading speed.

In other words, where Google's crawling, indexing and ranking systems typically used the desktop version of a page's content, it has now moved to using the mobile version of the page for indexing and ranking. This is because indexing desktop pages was causing issues for mobile searchers—i.e. the majority of people looking for information on Google.

Improve your site speed

At the inspiration phase, capturing traveler attention is a challenge. It's a highly competitive landscape and users will bounce off your website if they don't get the information they're looking for as quickly as possible. Site speed, or how quickly your pages load, is essential.

Globally, 70% of mobile network connections occur at 3G speeds or slower. If your site takes around 10 seconds to load, you increase the chance of visitors bouncing from your site by 120%⁵.

Again, when it comes to search engine rankings, Google takes site speed for both desktop and mobile seriously, as it affects the overall user experience. Google's free tool Test My Site allows you to test your page loading time and recommends fixes you can implement to increase your site speed. For travel, the industry average page loading time is four seconds⁶.

Run your site speed test today and implement the suggested fixes. Small changes like compressing images or making tweaks to your CSS could make a significant difference to your site loading speed.



Mobile first optimization



Improve your site speed



Web push

Web push

While many brands use email newsletters or website pop-ups to push offers, a few lines of code added to your site will allow you to send web push notifications.

There are lots of benefits to using web push:

- * You don't need an app to use it. A few lines of code added to your site will allow you to start sending push messages directly from your website.
- * Users don't need to have your website open to receive the push and can receive them to both their mobile devices and desktop.
- * Click-through rates of web push far outperform those of emails and are four to eight times higher³³.
- * The immediacy of mobile push is so powerful. Emails can sit in inboxes for hours where push is actioned almost immediately.

Organic and paid search

Search optimization through organic and paid channels is a core part of every OTA's digital marketing strategy. Target keywords and phrases will change as your customers move through their journey, so it is essential that when planning your SEO and PPC strategies, you consider each step of the process.

This is where your traveler persona profile data will add significant value. It is vital to work with the data function within your OTA to establish the customers you should be targeting, the keywords they're searching for and, critically, how they are responding to your campaigns. Your SEO and pay-per-click (PPC) strategy should be a dynamic process, continually changing as you enrich it with more customer insights and data.

It's therefore essential that your data function is not a siloed business unit; it must be intertwined with your marketing and customer facing teams to enable the greatest success.

Organic

When considering search engine optimization (SEO) at the inspiration phase, you should target specific long tail keywords that are relevant to your personas. For example, if your goal is to increase bookings among your 'family' traveler personas within a certain destination, you might consider a keyword like 'family-friendly destinations in France'.

Remember, at this stage the traveler is looking for ideas, so keywords should be targeted towards inspiration. While keywords like 'car rental in [Location]' is more appropriate when you're targeting travelers at the shopping/booking stage of the journey, they are less important when it comes to the inspiration phase. Travelers are looking for experiences and ideas, rather than the practicalities.

Google reports that searches like 'honeymoon destinations' and 'Europe destinations' are common searches at the inspiration stage of the traveler journey, along with 'Best time to visit [destination]'⁷.

New trends in travel SEO

The experience is everything

People's motivations for traveling are changing and it's important to monitor keyword trends to help grow inspirational traffic to your website. For example, there has been a big increase in activity-related searches beyond the traditional 'must-see' tourist attractions. People aren't just looking to visit the Eiffel Tower, they're also looking for the shooting locations of their favorite TV shows or movies³⁴.

This shows the increasing importance of thinking outside the 'travel' box when putting together a keyword strategy.

Traditional sightseeing searches



New sources of wanderlust: Shooting locations...





60% of searches for destination information come from mobile devices. When you are focusing on the inspiration phase of your customer journey, it should be with a mobile-first mindset.

Paid

As more travel brands than ever are shifting online, search ad auctions are becoming more crowded, resulting in increasing cost-per-click prices. Suppliers like hotels and airlines are upping their direct booking campaigns in the space too⁸, making the competition for customer attention tougher than ever.

When looking at your pay-per-click (PPC) strategy, you should choose very specific keywords to bid on that will deliver the best return on investment for your OTA. For example, if through your data insights you know that a large percentage of backpacker travelers tend to take trips between September and November, you can bid on keywords like 'backpacking destinations in

September' or 'best places to take backpacking trip in September'.

Mobile app

If your agency has a mobile app, this is a useful channel to use to inspire travelers looking for their next adventure. Seventy-two percent of travelers use smartphone apps to research trips⁹ and push notifications, personalized offers, and targeting by location are just some of the tactics you can use. Of course, the first step in being able to employ any of these tactics is to have people download your app in the first place.

Here are some of the ways you can boost app downloads at the inspiration stage.

- Offer incentives for downloading your app: You could offer extra loyalty points or a one-time discount for those who download your app.
- Feature your app prominently on your website's homepage: If you're looking to boost app downloads, you can feature 'Download our app' as a key call-to-action on your homepage.
- App Store Optimization (ASO): ASO is the process of optimizing and improving the visibility of an app within an app store to increase its discovery and ranking with the ultimate goal to drive more



Inspiration

- * Family-friendly holiday in [destination]
- * Backpacking trip in Europe
- * Honeymoon package holidays
- * Top destinations to visit in Spring
- * Visit Game of Thrones filming location



Shopping

- * Cheap flights to [destination]
- * Compare flights to [destination]
- * Package holidays to [destination]
- * Flights and accommodation to [destination]
- * Flights and hotels in [destination]



Booking

- * Book hotels in [destination]
- * Book flight from [origin] to [destination]
- * Book vacation packages



Pre-trip

- * Car rental in [destination]
- * Things to do in [destination]
- * Do I need a visa for [destination]?
- * Travel insurance



In-trip

- * What to do in [location]
- * Things to do near me
- * Restaurant recommendations in [destination]
- * Child-friendly restaurant near me



Post trip

- * Post vacation blues
- * How to beat post-trip blues

Sample keywords across the customer journey

Here are some ideas to help get your SEO and PPC strategy started. The longtail keywords you use will depend on your products, traveler personas and business KPIs.

downloads. You can do this by optimizing your app title, icon, categories, keywords, imagery/videos, descriptions and reviews. The higher your app ranks in the app store, the more chance it has of being found.

Destination marketing

Featuring destination content in the form of blogs, images, and videos is an excellent way to increase engagement at the inspiration stage and attract visitors to your website. Travelport's Global Digital Traveler Research 2018 found that almost 50% of respondents are influenced by videos and images when researching travel.

You can begin to build up your own content library, featuring content on destinations that your OTA is promoting at a given time. However, it can be time-consuming to build out a content and SEO strategy, so you need to consider whether you want to do this in-house or outsource to an agency.

Another option is to integrate a third-party plugin into your website. For example, ArrivalGuides by Lonely Planet provides destination content for travel brands including articles, images, and videos in multiple languages, across tens of thousands of points of interest. Using a third-party supplier that integrates into your own platforms will allow you to get up and running with your destination marketing quickly and will ensure content is updated regularly.

Experiences and activities

Experiences and activities are key elements in inspiring travelers as they search for destinations. Phocuswright reports that 70% of US travelers say that activity options are an important aspect when

deciding where to go and more than one-third start researching trip activities before any other trip element¹⁰. The report also shows that 47% of travelers search for activities on general search engines, 27% on traveler review sites, and 17% on metasearch.

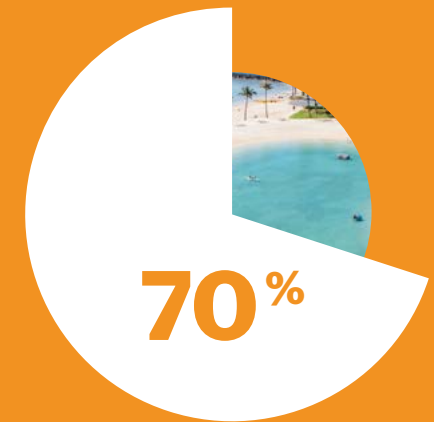
When building your destination content, consider how activities and experiences can influence your traveler personas at the inspiration stage of the customer journey.

User generated content

Another way to curate destination content on your website is by allowing your users to generate and publish it. User generated content is becoming one of the most important deciding factors for consumers when booking travel, as it can be considered more credible than content published by brands.

Your OTA can incentivize and encourage customers to contribute reviews and articles on destinations they have visited. Enabling your travelers to publish this content can inspire others to follow in their footsteps and you can link to relevant offers on your site directly from user generated articles.

For example, Hilton's 'Hilton Suggests' platform features destination blogs from a global team with inspirational content and recommendations. Each article also features a call-to-action, inviting the reader to search for hotels in relevant destinations.



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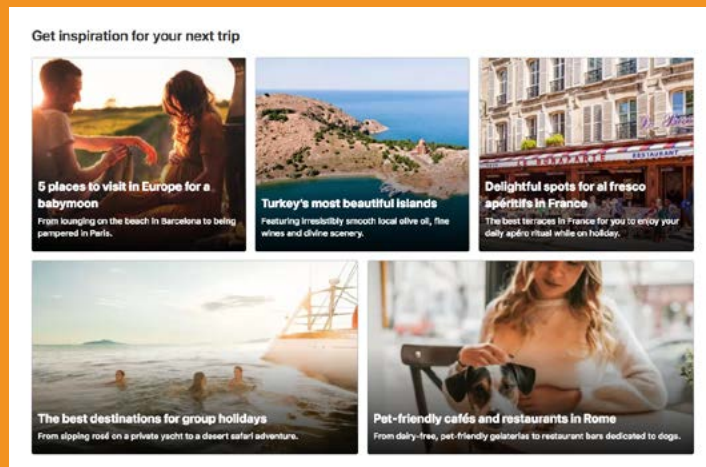


1/3
more than one-third start researching trip activities before any other trip element*

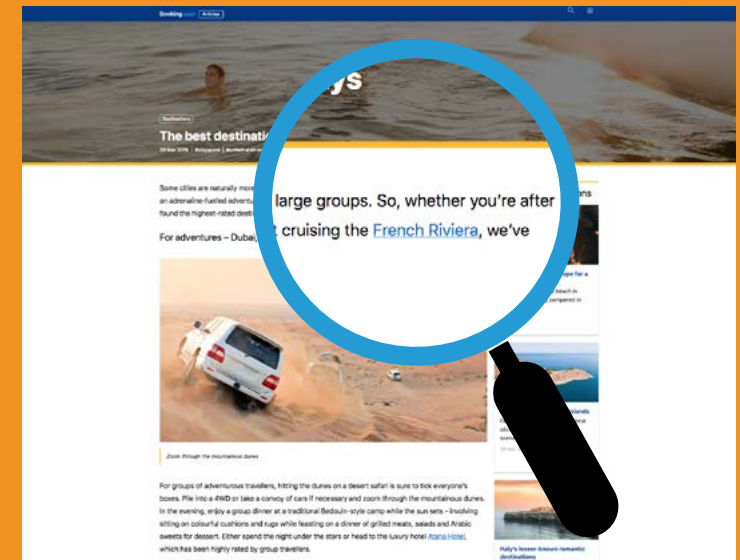
**Phocuswright, 2019*

User generated content

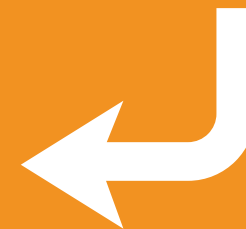
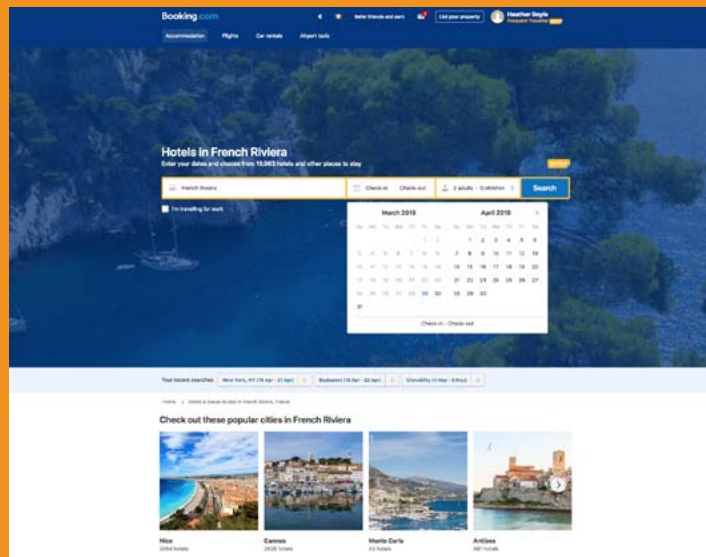
Inspiring articles



Advertisement insertion



Referral to product page



Social media

Social media has a particularly big part to play in the inspiration phase—28% of people get their travel inspiration from Facebook and Instagram¹¹ and 67% of leisure travelers are influenced by posts made by family and friends through social media when researching travel¹².

Social is growing in importance every day—in fact, some companies like the flight prediction app, Hopper, spend 100% of its marketing budget on social. Other than App Stores, social media is the single most-used platform where you can talk to your users on mobile.

Here's an overview of how you can strengthen your social media marketing across some of the world's largest platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and WeChat.

Facebook

Facebook users spend five times more time there than on travel apps, sites, and searches combined and 68% of millennials found ideas for their most recent trip on Facebook¹³.

That being said, social media marketing on Facebook is becoming increasingly difficult. Organic reach is limited and there is an overwhelming variety of ad types that you can run.

If you're starting out with Facebook advertising, you should focus on these four core ad types:

- * Video ads
- * Canvas ads
- * Multi-product (Carousel)
- * Facebook pixels

Instagram

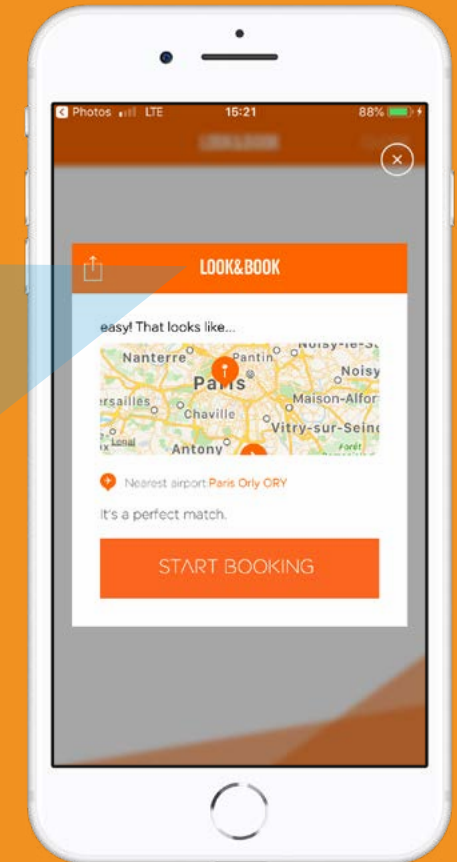
Instagram is one of the fastest-growing social media platforms in the world and hit one billion monthly average users in 2018. Eighty percent of accounts follow a business on Instagram and users have ten times the interaction with a brand than on Facebook¹⁴.



While primarily used by travelers in-trip to share their experiences, easyJet has shown how travel brands can use Instagram for much more; i.e. converting inspiration directly into booking. easyJet's Look&Book app feature allows users to book flights using just an Instagram photo, without even needing to know the destination.

Instagram users can grab an inspiring destination photo they see on their feed and upload it to the easyJet app. The image recognition technology identifies the location and matches the photo to over 1000 European destinations. The app then pre-populates its booking form with flight details to the nearest airport—allowing users to turn Instagram daydreams into bookings in just a few taps.

With a conversion rate of 5.3% in its first two months live¹⁵, easyJet's Look&Book feature truly shows the power of Instagram wanderlust in driving conversion and revenue for travel brands.



easyJet's Look&Book app feature allows users to book flights using just an Instagram photo, without even needing to know the destination.

Pinterest

Pinterest is especially relevant at the inspiration phase, as it is a highly visual social media channel. The platform claims to have two million travel saves per day and over 40 million people in the US using Pinterest every month for travel ideas. Three in 4 travel Pinners say travel Pins from brands are useful and near all will act on what they see, often booking an unplanned trip¹⁶.

Twitter

Although 80% of Twitter users access it on mobile, it has nowhere near the reach of Facebook or Instagram. If you couple that with the fact that the cost per acquisition is much higher, and conversion is lower, Twitter is not as cost effective an option as Instagram or Facebook.

However, research shows that travelers who use Twitter are looking for certain things from travel brands on this network¹⁷:

- * **46% of travelers want exclusive discounts**
- * **27% of travelers want travel ideas and stories**

So, if you're going to use Twitter, you should to tailor your content to these travelers for maximum impact.

WeChat

WeChat is more than a social media channel and has been referred to as a 'super app'. The Chinese app started as a mobile messaging platform and now offers everything from photo sharing to conference calls, travel booking, bill paying, and customer service.

With over one billion monthly active users, WeChat is one of the most-used apps in the world and is used by travelers at virtually every stage of the customer journey. It's for this reason that so many travel brands have a presence on the platform. KLM's former Senior VP of Digital Tjalling Smit said it best:

“Rather than trying to move 1.3 billion Chinese to our app, we moved to WeChat. We should be on apps that people really use! Not just do our own”.

Shopping



Inspiration



Shopping



Booking



Pre-trip



In-trip



Post-trip

Shopping

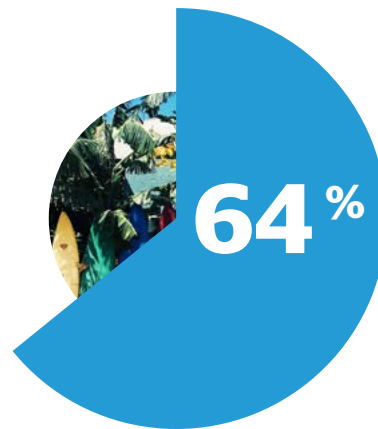
Once you've tuned in to your customers' travel wish list and inspired them with relevant destination content created just for them, it's time to shape and enhance their shopping experience. To do this, you can create personalized offers based on data insights, suggesting flights, hotel rooms, car rentals, activities, and more that may suit them.

If you can do this successfully, travelers can simply select their travel options from the relevant suggestions you've provided. This takes the friction out of the shopping process, reducing the time that travelers spend searching for flights, hotel rooms, and other products, showing them that you understand and value them as customers.

As well as dramatically improving the customer experience, streamlining the shopping process also brings you significant commercial benefits. It's shown to increase conversion, and you can also reduce the window between shopping and booking.

This chapter covers some of the ways you can optimize the shopping experience.

- * Hit the 'search sweet spot'
- * Branded fares
- * Personalized offers
- * Reviews
- * Dynamic packaging



of those who search for travel with an OTA, 64% prefer to book directly with the airline/hotel/car supplier

- Conversion (page view to search)
- Cost per acquisition (CPA) per channel (paid/earned/owned)
- Shop to book lag

KPIs



How to optimize conversions at shopping

Hit the ‘search sweet spot’

We have already covered how to speed up your webpages, as this is an essential step in both attracting visitors to your site and keeping them there once they arrive. At the shopping stage of the customer journey, your visitors will start making more definite travel plans, which usually start out with searching for flights to their chosen destination.

It’s absolutely vital that your website can return flight search queries as quickly as possible, or you risk losing visitors to competitor OTAs and supplier websites. After all, the traveler is still shopping around and is unlikely to have an affiliation to any one brand, and 52% of travelers with smartphones say they’d switch sites or apps because it takes too long to load¹⁸. To optimize for conversion, your OTA should be aiming to process search responses in **under two seconds**.

Here are some of the ways your OTA can hit that ‘search sweet spot’ and return quick and relevant results that encourage more bookings.

Mobile-optimized results

When it comes to optimizing for mobile, fast, accurate and relevant search results are an absolute necessity. Asking smartphone users to scroll through hundreds of flight choices will not hold their attention.

By optimizing your search API for mobile, your OTA can deliver the right information, quickly and at the right time, irrespective of the devices your customers use.

- * An API optimized for mobile devices makes flight searches fast and easy. It accelerates response times and provides the right content by connecting directly to search engines rather than going through unnecessary network infrastructures.
- * Optimized APIs also support pagination and asynchronous streaming results. Pagination helps make use of the limited shelf space on a mobile or desktop screen by only displaying a few results at a time. The traveler can use a ‘More’ or ‘Next’ button to get the next set of small, but relevant results.
- * The trick for OTAs is to find the balance between not enough content and too much and this can be managed through spacing out content across multiple screens, with the best and most relevant content appearing first.



Mobile-optimized results



Intelligent caching



Use the ‘waiting’ screen



To optimize for conversion, your OTA should be aiming to process search responses in under two seconds.

Intelligent caching

If you are losing customers from your site due to slow performance, intelligent caching technology can help your OTA to display results to search requests instantly, even when filtering through thousands of products on the market.

Intelligent caching stores previous search results in a 'cache', which retains the relevant elements of a search result, such as price, and displays this for customers without the need to connect to a supplier's system. Intelligent caching can predict when the stored information is relevant to the search, or when a direct hit to a supplier's system is required.

Use the 'waiting' screen

Another great way for your OTA to capture the ever-fleeting attention of travelers and drive them toward conversion is to make use of the typical 'waiting' screen. This will occur after the traveler clicks 'Search' and before the first results begin to display.

Rather than a spinning clock, you could return a few fast and convenient search results while the full result set populates. This technology is called **asynchronous search**, and it can make a big difference between engagement and abandonment as travelers wait for their search results to appear. Asynchronous search returns results from various providers as they become available, rather than aggregating all results before returning a single response.

There are a number of key advantages to boosting your existing API ecosystem with intelligent caching...

Response time improvements

Research from Amazon into site speed showed that for every one second delay in response time, the conversion rate is reduced by 7%. Websites that are viewed by tens of millions of users and receive, in some cases, a billion-plus requests per day, can quickly slow to the point where users look elsewhere. With intelligent caching users can receive sub second responses (roughly four times as fast as using only an API).

Inspirational travel itineraries

The cache data can be also be used for: pricing examples displaying a competitive fare for top destinations; pre-populating calendars showing fares for different date combinations; and inspirational listings of top cities or destinations.

Packaging

Cache data is also an important component in building both static and dynamic packages combining air, hotel, car, and experience content to display a more bundled travel option.

Customer insight and intelligence

Caching brings travel brands a massive data store of booking patterns, which can be used to drive the 'intelligence' of their business. For instance, heat maps of these booking patterns can help determine future demand and pricing strategy—something that API alone cannot provide because the vast amount of data flow would cripple the system.

Intelligent caching also has its uses in diverting scrapers and bots that consistently hit supplier websites in the search for price and availability.

Cost savings from network traffic

While the move to cloud and competition in this space has significantly reduced the operating costs for today's travel providers, charging for data transfer is a staple of the pricing model. Eliminating huge chunks of transactions from going to external parties due to caching will help you save significantly on this cost item.

Branded fares

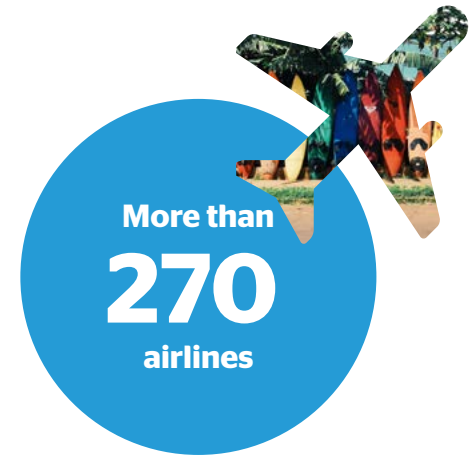
As part of creative pricing strategies, airlines are now targeting different types of traveler needs through the introduction of branded fares. The service options can vary from no-frills economy class seats, where optional services like checked bags and seat selection are not included, to offerings that include a higher level of service, flexibility, and comfort a traveler is willing to pay for.

Branded fares in search

More than 270 airlines offer these types of fares and accessing branded fares and ancillary services can be difficult for an agency, leaving the agency with only the flight times and price to present to the traveler. As

a result, travelers often resort to an airline's website to understand what's included in the fare and to add ancillaries to their booking. This behavior is starting to have a significant impact on air bookings for OTAs, shifting visitors directly to the airline's site to book.

At the shopping stage, travelers are in comparison mode. To optimize for conversion, it's essential that your OTA can present travelers with the branded fares options available across multiple airlines, to enable them to research the best offers quickly and all in one place. By doing so, you are eliminating the need for the traveler to visit multiple supplier sites to compare offers, and you're showing the value of booking with your OTA: ease, simplicity, and reassurance they're getting the best deal.



**offer branded fare
and ancillary services**

Results for Sydney to Singapore

Athena Airlines		Carry on baggage	Checked baggage	Rebookable	Refundable	Seat Reservation	Meals	Wifi
DEPART 07:10 SYD → 11:25* 17h 10m SIN	\$223.00 SELECT	8kg	\$	X	X	\$	\$	●
VALUE				Upgrade <input type="checkbox"/> Departure <input type="checkbox"/> Return				
RETURN 04:10 SIN ← 9:25* 17h 22m SYD	\$243.00 SELECT	8kg	20kg	X	X	\$	\$	●
STANDARD								
Kronos Airlines		Carry on baggage	Checked baggage	Rebookable	Refundable	Seat Reservation	Meals	Wifi
DEPART 06:10 SYD → 10:33* 17h 10m SIN	\$283.00 SELECT	8kg	\$	X	X	\$	\$	●
FLY				Upgrade <input type="checkbox"/> Departure <input type="checkbox"/> Return				
RETURN 02:00 SIN ← 7:15* 17h 22m SYD	\$314.00 SELECT	8kg	20kg	X	X	\$	\$	●
FLY + BAG								

Branded fares in the shopping cart

For many OTAs the majority of their traffic is generated through metasearch channels. When customers come to an OTA website from metasearch, they are presented with a shopping cart that displays the fare they chose on the metasearch provider's site. As a result, the customer has a very limited choice, which leads to bounce.

By displaying the other fare options available on the chosen itinerary, the customer can make a more informed choice on which offer meets their needs. Many OTAs that provide this choice are seeing

the benefits of an increase in conversion, higher margins on the upsell, and creating more value for their airline partners.

They are also addressing the needs of customer groups like business travelers who are seeking more flexible travel itineraries or a higher class of service.

Personalized offers

Users bounce across multiple sites, aggregators and search engines and may end up viewing hundreds

of different travel options before finally clicking 'book'. As more variations and computations take place for each online air or hotel search, it's no surprise that conversion rates of OTAs are falling.

To solve this challenge and eliminate consumer frustrations, OTAs must apply relevant technologies to profile travelers and to get to know their preferences. Achieving this level of personalization will allow OTAs to apply search parameters that are most likely to return results that prompt those travelers to book flights or hotels.



Would you like to upgrade your flight?

SYD to MEL								Compare all fare options
Economy Starter with 20kg Public	1X7KG	1X20KG	✗	✗	⌘	⌘	✗	Details
Economy Starter Plus Public	1X7KG	1X20KG	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	Details
Economy Starter Max	1X7KG	Max 30KG	✓	⌘	✓	✓	✗	Details

AUD 235	AUD 305	AUD 718
SYD > MEL - Economy Starter with 20kg Public	SYD > MEL - Economy Starter Plus Public	SYD > MEL - Economy Starter Max

Booking.com for example uses a number of onsite personalization tactics to maximize conversions including:

- **Geolocation personalization:**

Booking.com uses website visitors' IP addresses to make suggestions based on their location. Your OTA could employ similar tactics. For example, you could build traveler profiles based on location and suggest destinations that are popular with other travelers from the same country or city.

- **Welcoming repeat visitors:**

When a user returns to Booking.com they receive a 'Welcome back' message and their last search is saved on the main call-to-action search form on the homepage. A study from Barilliance showed that returning site visitors added items to carts 65.16% more than first time visitors¹⁹.

- **Suggestions based on search history:**

Booking.com adapts its homepage offers based on the user's search history. It prominently displays an offer based on the user's most recent search query and then presents other related secondary offers.

Another way to personalize your search results is to provide filters that allow users to refine their searches by their own preferences. For example, Trivago's recent 2019 Traveler Profile Industry Insights shows that the most popular filters used are price, hotel star rating and guest rating. The most popular amenity filter for travelers looking for a hotel is 'breakfast included'²⁰.

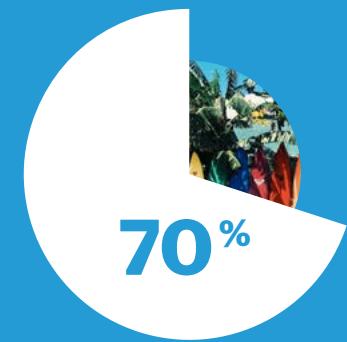
Reviews

As customers are reviewing their options of where they will stay and who they will fly with, it is now, at the shopping stage, when they will look at reviews to compare providers. Seventy percent of our OTA end traveler survey respondents said that they trust reviews on OTA sites, so this is a perfect opportunity to grow brand loyalty and trust.

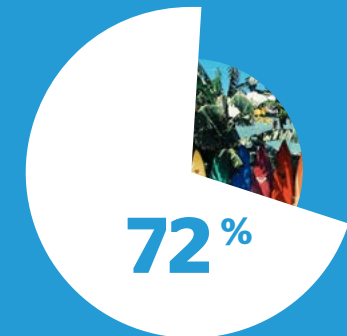
If you don't currently host reviews on your website, using a third-party API like TripAdvisor Content will allow your OTA to display reviews that are on TripAdvisor, as well as allow users to leave reviews directly through your website or app.

TripAdvisor works with accommodations, restaurants, and attractions providing the following types of content through its API:

- Location ID, name, address, latitude, and longitude
- Read reviews link, write-a-review link
- Overall rating, ranking, subratings, awards, the number of reviews the rating is based on, rating bubbles image
- Price level symbol, accommodation category/subcategory, attraction type, restaurant cuisine(s)²¹



trust reviews they see on online travel agency websites



trust TripAdvisor reviews



Reviews on OTA sites are more trusted than on supplier sites

% of travelers who trust reviews on the following platforms...

72% Travel review websites (e.g. TripAdvisor)

70% Online travel agencies

70% Hotel comparison sites

66% Hotel websites

66% Airline websites

60% Meta search

56% Car rental websites

53% Car rental comparison sites

51% Social media



Dynamic packaging

At the shopping stage of the journey, the traveler is at a point where they can be persuaded to book with the travel brand that gives them the best deal. They are looking for providers who can offer the whole package: the best offers and prices, as well as the best customer service and website or app experience. Your OTA needs to give them a good reason to book with you over the many other providers who are likely offering the same flights and hotels at similar prices.

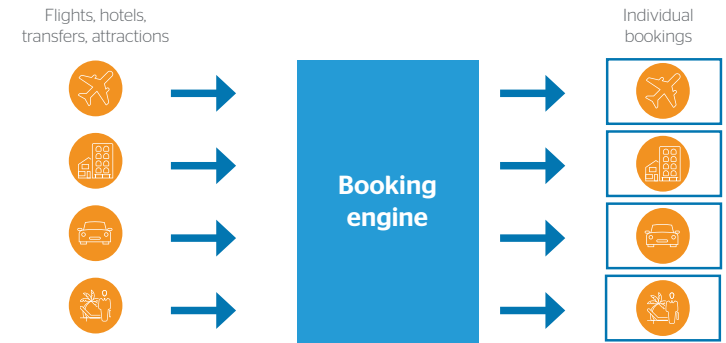
Dynamic packaging is an excellent way to allow your travelers to self-serve and build their perfect trip, while also allowing your OTA to increase its average shopping cart value. It is a method used in package holiday bookings to enable customers to build their own package of flights, accommodation, car rental, and activities instead of buying a pre-defined package.

Why dynamic packaging?

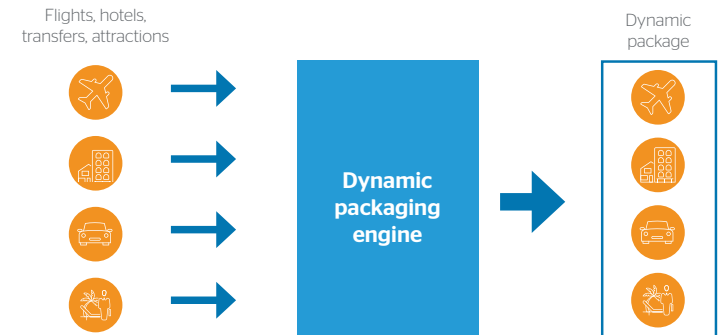
- The traveler can book their entire trip in one transaction. Seventy-three percent of travelers say they would re-book a trip with an OTA if they could book everything in the one place.
- Travelers can usually find a lower price by building their own package rather than booking flight, accommodation, and car separately.
- It allows your OTA to increase shopping cart value; where a traveler may have previously booked a flight alone, offering dynamic packaging can help to boost hotel and car attachment rates at the booking stage.
- Dynamic packaging puts control into the hands of the traveler, allowing them to customize their own end-to-end trip.

How does it work?

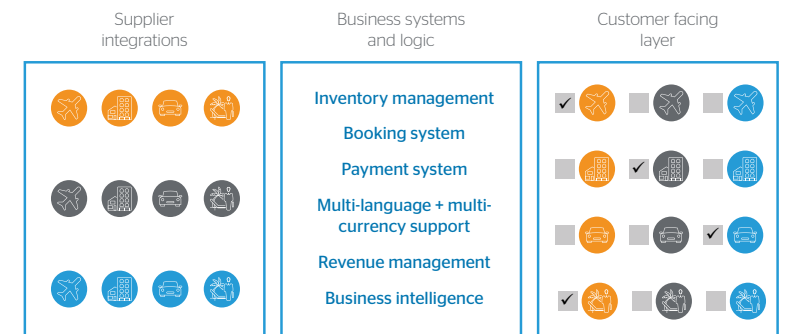
Ordinary booking workflow



Dynamic packaging workflow



Dynamic packaging engine



Booking



Inspiration



Shopping



Booking



Pre-trip



In-trip



Post-trip

Booking

The research is done, the destination decided and now the traveler is ready to buy. At this stage of the journey, they have already visited multiple travel websites and weighed up their options, however there is still plenty that your OTA can do to ensure that the booking is made on *your* website.

While 82% of travelers tell us that they always book with the website that offers the best price, it's no longer enough to just give travelers a good price—there are thousands of agencies all over the world doing that. Now, you need to show the value of booking with your OTA; everything from the range of offers you have available, how easy it is to add ancillary products, how user-friendly the booking process is, and what customer support you can offer along the way.

In this chapter, we will look at some of the ways you can optimize conversions at the booking stage, as well as increase shopping cart value, including:

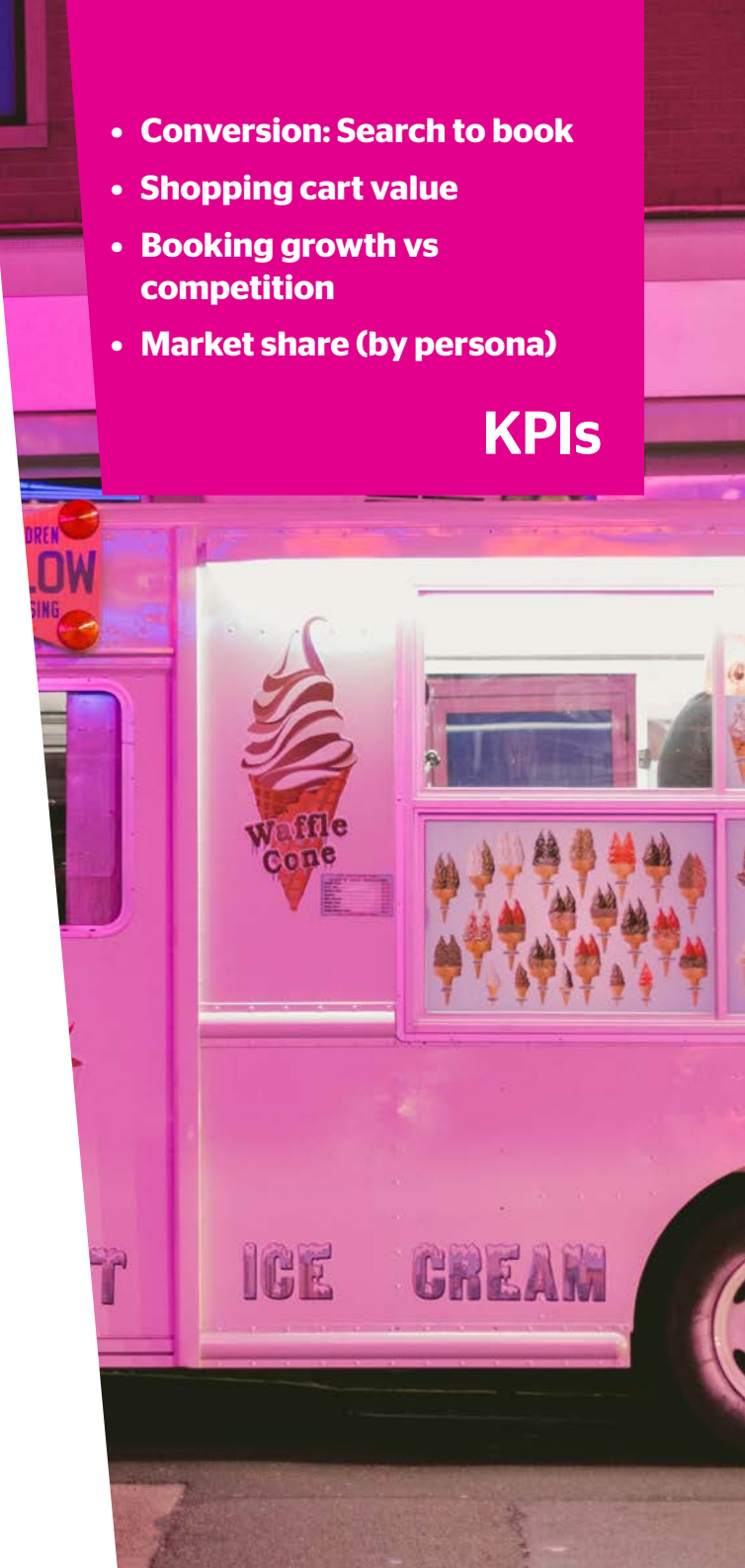
- * Booking flow optimization
- * Multi-device booking
- * Price prediction
- * Urgency
- * Ancillary upsell
- * Retargeting
- * Customer support
- * Multi-ticket itineraries



of travelers use between
2-3 supplier or OTA websites
/apps to book

- Conversion: Search to book
- Shopping cart value
- Booking growth vs competition
- Market share (by persona)

KPIs

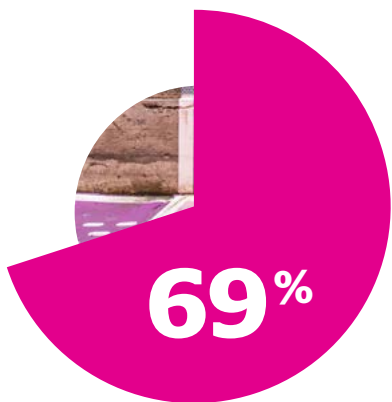


How to optimize conversions at booking

Booking flow optimization

The inspiration and shopping phases are all about generating visitors to your website and leading them through to searching; at the booking stage, your main focus should be on getting the conversion. Optimizing your online booking flow and testing conversion paths are key steps in turning your website visitors into customers.

Conversion rate optimization relies not only on your check-out page, but on every webpage and touchpoint that leads to that 'confirm booking' button. Here are some guidelines on how to optimize your booking flow for conversions.



of travelers would like to receive a reminder to finish an incomplete booking

Limit the number of fields to fill out

Always consider your mobile users. Although more of your bookings may still be made on desktop, mobile bookings are consistently growing, particularly last-minute bookings.

Forms with fewer fields have been found to have a 65% higher conversion rate on mobile³⁶.

Minimize the number of clicks required

Hotel guests are 14% more likely to complete the booking if there are fewer than 4.6 clicks to reserve their stay³⁵.

Capture data early in the process

By having a user create an account early in the process, you can capture data and get a view of how many people started a booking but didn't complete it.

This allows you to send them a reminder to complete the booking (which 69% of travelers want to receive from OTAs) and initiate remarketing campaigns.

Enable social logins

Here is why you should incorporate social logins into your website registration form.

* **Ease:** Allowing visitors to register with your OTA using their social media profiles will make the sign-up process (and therefore the booking process) easier. They have fewer fields to complete, which is particularly useful for mobile users.

By removing these steps, you are increasing the chance of conversion and reducing the likelihood of shopping cart abandonment.

* **Data:** Social login offers instant demographic data about your users, which can be used to further build out traveler profiles (e.g. age, relationship status, and interests).

Make it easy to change dates

If a user wants to change dates half way through the booking process, don't make them go back to the first step.

According to Booking.com, websites where you can easily change the reservation dates before you complete the booking have a 170% higher conversion rate than ones that don't³⁷.

Multi-device booking

Google research shows that 94% of leisure travelers switch between devices when they plan or book a trip, and 46% of travelers with smartphones say they make their decision on mobile, but then book on another device²². Allowing users to start a booking on one device and continue it on another is a good way to provide additional value throughout the booking stage and provides a more seamless user experience, which in turn can lead to higher conversion rates.

Some traveler personas, like a solo traveler or couple booking a last-minute weekend trip, may prefer to make a booking through a mobile device. On the other hand, a family of five booking a two-week holiday will be far more likely to turn to desktop to complete their booking.

Google research also found that only 23% of leisure travelers are confident they can find all of the same hotel and flight information on their smartphone that they can on their desktop²³. To help increase conversions on mobile devices, your OTA should consider allowing customers to cancel with no penalties within a certain timeframe (e.g. within 24 or 48 hours), to help relieve user anxiety when booking on mobile.



94% switch between devices when they plan or book a trip

Price prediction

According to Travelport's 2018 Digital Traveler Survey, 50% of U.S. travelers and 51% of Canadian travelers identified the time spent trying to find the best price as a top pain point for searching and booking leisure trips. When the time comes to actually book, travelers want to know they're getting the best deal, and 71% want OTAs to offer predictions on when air fares are likely to go up or down.

By looking at historical price points and predicting where pricing is going based on current market data, you can begin to advise customers on when they should be booking to get the best deals. In doing so, you can reassure customers that you have their best interests at heart, helping you to build stronger, trust-based relationships with them. You can also differentiate your own services by delivering innovative price consultancy that few agencies currently offer.



50% identified the time spent trying to find the best price as a top pain point

Hopper: Price predictions

Hopper saves users time, money, and anxiety in their quest to book the perfect trip by offering travelers recommendations and alerts based on highly accurate pricing predictions.

The app accesses bookable travel options using Travelport's next-generation APIs, then uses machine learning to uncover price drops and exclusive deals for a personalized search and booking experience on mobile devices.



71% want OTAs to offer predictions on when air fares are likely to go up or down

Create urgency

OTAs have long employed urgency selling tactics to increase conversion. For example, including the following messages on flight or hotel offers:

- **Availability messaging:** There are 5 rooms/seats remaining; 5 people are viewing this hotel room.
- **Popularity:** 10 rooms/seats booked in the last 24 hours
- **Countdown:** Offer ends in 24 hours

While this tactic can be effective in increasing conversions, it is important not to misrepresent the availability of offers on your website. The UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) recently investigated the selling habits of some major OTAs for potential infringement of the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations, 2008.

While the CMA did not conclude if OTAs were operating illegally, there has been a voluntary agreement among travel brands to change certain behaviors. For example, OTAs who want to use urgency selling tactics must provide absolute clarity—i.e. if including messaging that other customers are looking at the same hotel, the OTA must make it clear that they may be searching for different dates²⁴.

Ancillaries

Increasing shopping cart value through ancillary upsell and cross sell is a primary goal for every online travel agency. And the good news is that travelers want to buy 'beyond-air' content: 71% say that it's important to be able to add extras to their bookings with an OTA, and 73% would book again with an OTA who gave them the ability to book an end-to-end trip in one place.

However, knowing when to push ancillary products, especially throughout the booking process, is a delicate balance. It is vital to keep the booking form as clear and uncluttered as possible and minimize the number of clicks to ensure users don't abandon the shopping cart out of frustration.

There are many stages of the customer journey when you can consider offering ancillary products, and it is all about pushing the right product to the right travelers at the right time. For example:

- * **If a user does not select a hotel room or insurance in the flight booking flow, then it may show up again at the booking confirmation page or email.**
- * **If an extra bag, meal, or seat is not selected, show it again in the check-in reminder email.**
- * **After the online check-in is completed, show in-flight wi-fi and activity options at the bottom of e-boarding pass.**

Personalization of your ancillary offering is key. By interrogating the booked itinerary, you will uncover triggers to tailor the content to your travelers and improve the cross-sell opportunity.



Areas you can analyze include:

- Passenger types in the booking: Number of adults, children and infants. By doing so, you can test which room rates, images, and amenities would attract the different passenger types.
- Length of stay
- Time of arrival time or departure: e.g. offering accommodation close to the airport if they have an early flight

It is essential to test and track the success rate of each of your offers against the persona type and refine which content should be offered to whom across the customer journey.

Remarketing

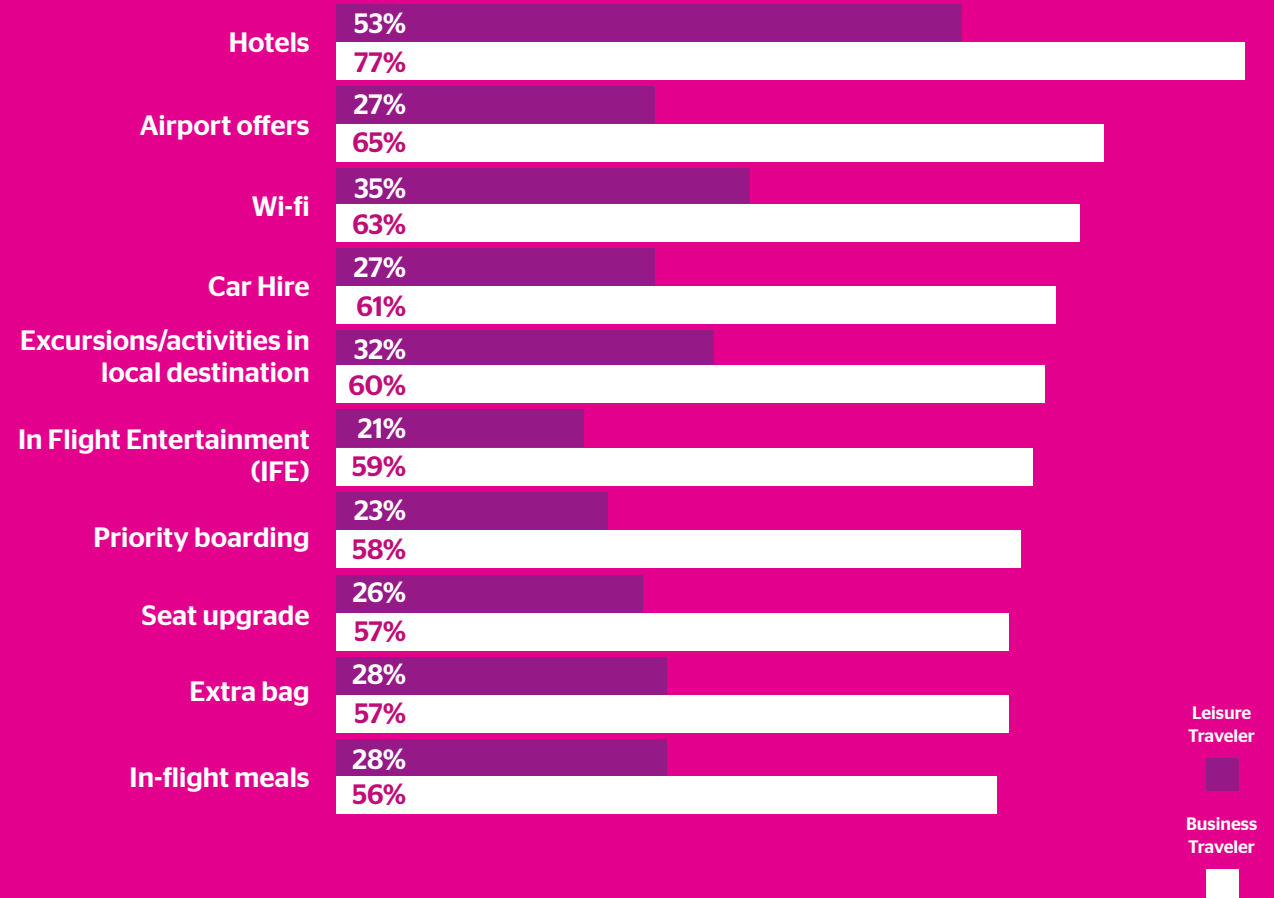
When it comes to your digital advertising efforts at the booking stage of the customer journey, remarketing is one of the most impactful strategies you can adopt. A user who has shown interest in your offers at the inspiration or shopping stage is far more likely to convert than someone who hasn't yet visited your website, so remarketing your offers to them can be a powerful part of your PPC strategy.

Remarketing in Google Ads involves using a special tracking code to place cookies on the browsers of people who visit your website, and then serving ads to those people.

These ads can take the form of static images, animated images, video, responsive ads, and text ads that are placed on the Google Display and Google Search Network.

Mobile ancillary sales are on the rise

Here are the ancillaries leisure and business travelers are buying through mobile devices.



Here are the remarketing options available through Google Ads:

Standard remarketing

Show ads to your past website visitors as they browse sites and apps on the Display Network.

Dynamic remarketing

This involves showing ads that include products or services that people viewed on your website or app.

Remarketing lists for search ads (RLSA)

Show ads to your past visitors as they do follow-up searches for what they need on Google, after leaving your website.

Video remarketing

Show ads to people who have interacted with your videos or YouTube channel as they use YouTube and browse Display Network videos, websites, and apps.

Customer list remarketing

Upload lists of contact information that your customers have given you. When those people are signed into Google, you can show them ads across different Google products.

Agent support

While the majority of travel bookings are made online, some travelers will still need to contact an agent before making their final decision. Travel is a high-value purchase and Travelport research found that 38% of leisure travelers think not being able to talk to a human is a pain point when booking travel²⁵.

Having agents available to assist with bookings is an essential step in helping to increase conversions for your OTA, whether that is over the phone or via email or chat services. Of course, agent time is precious, and every OTA wants to increase operational efficiencies by reducing low-value calls to their agency. Therefore, it is important to give all essential information upfront on your website so that when someone makes a call to your agency, they are virtually ready to book.

Our research with OTA end travelers found that 40% of respondents prefer to use 'online chat' to ask a query at the time of booking.

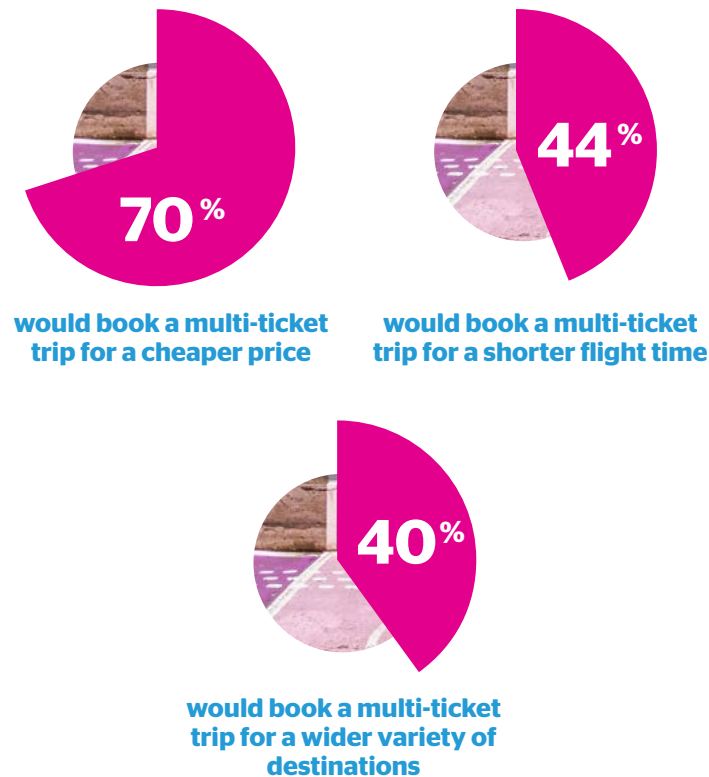
Ranking of preferred channels for communicating with an OTA at time of booking

1. Online chat
2. Email
3. Call the agency
4. Request a call back
5. Social media

Multi-ticket itineraries

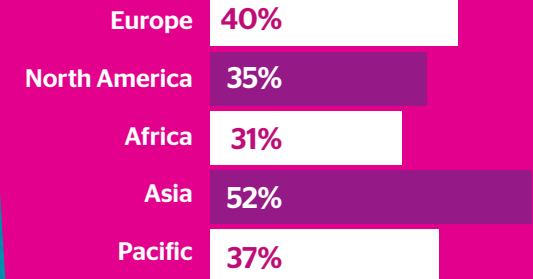
A new and growing OTA model is to deliver a competitive search response that includes multi-modal itinerary combinations and connection points for one-way, roundtrip, or multi-leg travel. The booking may consist of tickets from multiple suppliers and is a good way of increasing conversion among price-conscious travelers.

We recently asked over 2,000 end travelers who search or book travel with OTAs to tell us their opinion on booking multi-ticket itinerary trips. Here are the results, which include both itineraries using different carriers on the outbound and inbound, and itineraries combining multi-tickets between and origin and destination.

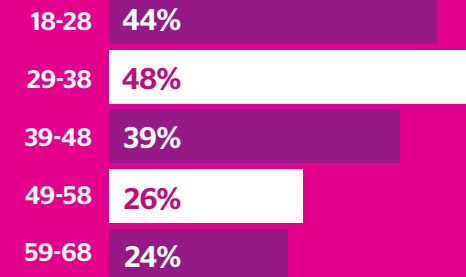


Travelers who have booked a multi-ticket itinerary trip

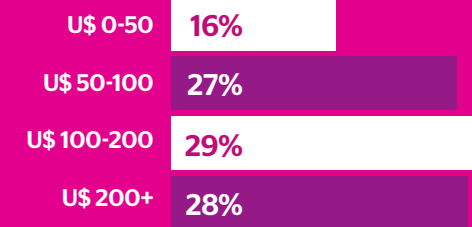
By region



By age group



How much extra would you need to save to book this kind of trip?





Online chat is the top channel travelers want to use to contact an OTA if they have a question during booking

Pre-trip



Inspiration



Shopping



Booking



Pre-trip



In-trip



Post-trip

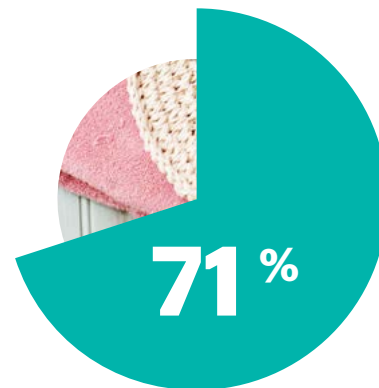
Pre-trip

The trip is booked (or at least the flight) and you have officially converted the looker into a booker. However, as an OTA your work is far from over and you are only half way through the customer journey. There are still plenty of opportunities to engage with the traveler, upsell and cross sell ancillaries, and position your brand as a trusted travel partner.

According to Travelport research, you have around 50 days to interact with your customers and get them excited before they travel. With the right data and analytics tools, you can use this precious time to suggest relevant activities and information to enhance their time away, and help you build a stronger, longer-lasting relationship with them.

As well as improving the experience for travelers, the ability to engage customers pre-trip can help your OTA tap into significant new revenue opportunities. In fact, Travelport research has found that travelers going away for more than two weeks could collectively generate an additional half a billion dollars in revenue each month if they accept just one travel agency marketing offer between when they book and when they travel. This is equal to a \$6 billion-dollar market that is not currently being fully exploited.

And in terms of what you can market to travelers pre-trip, the options are virtually limitless, as long as you stay relevant and focused on what customers are likely to find interesting. The possibilities include everything from insurance and ancillaries, to support with required visas, information about local events and activities, and more.



think it's important to be able to add ancillaries after their booking

- Customer engagement
- Conversion of ancillaries (e.g. travel insurance, in-flight extras, in-trip activities)

KPIs



How to optimize conversions at pre-trip

Build relationship with customers

The pre-trip phase of the traveler journey is the perfect time to continue building a relationship with your customers. Your OTA can make preparing for their trip easier by sending timely, contextual, and relevant communications. Some useful communications you can send include:

- * **Reminder to check-in**
- * **Visa/vaccination information relevant to their destination**
- * **A reminder to download your app**

While there are any number of channels through which you can communicate with your customers, push notifications are one of the most useful tools at your disposal. Travelport Digital research shows that the number of people with push notifications activated on travel apps rose by 10% between 2018 and 2019, and there was also a 22% increase in travelers who say they find these notifications useful²⁶.

It is also important to bear in mind that even if your OTA doesn't have an app, you can still create a push messaging strategy. By using Apple Wallet, web push, or other mobile messaging platforms, you can send push notifications and build out an engagement strategy that allows you to keep in touch with travelers at every stage of the journey.

What push notifications do travelers find useful?

76% Trip status (e.g. flight delayed, check-in time)

70% Price change of a flight

66% Reminder of a booking/purchase in progress

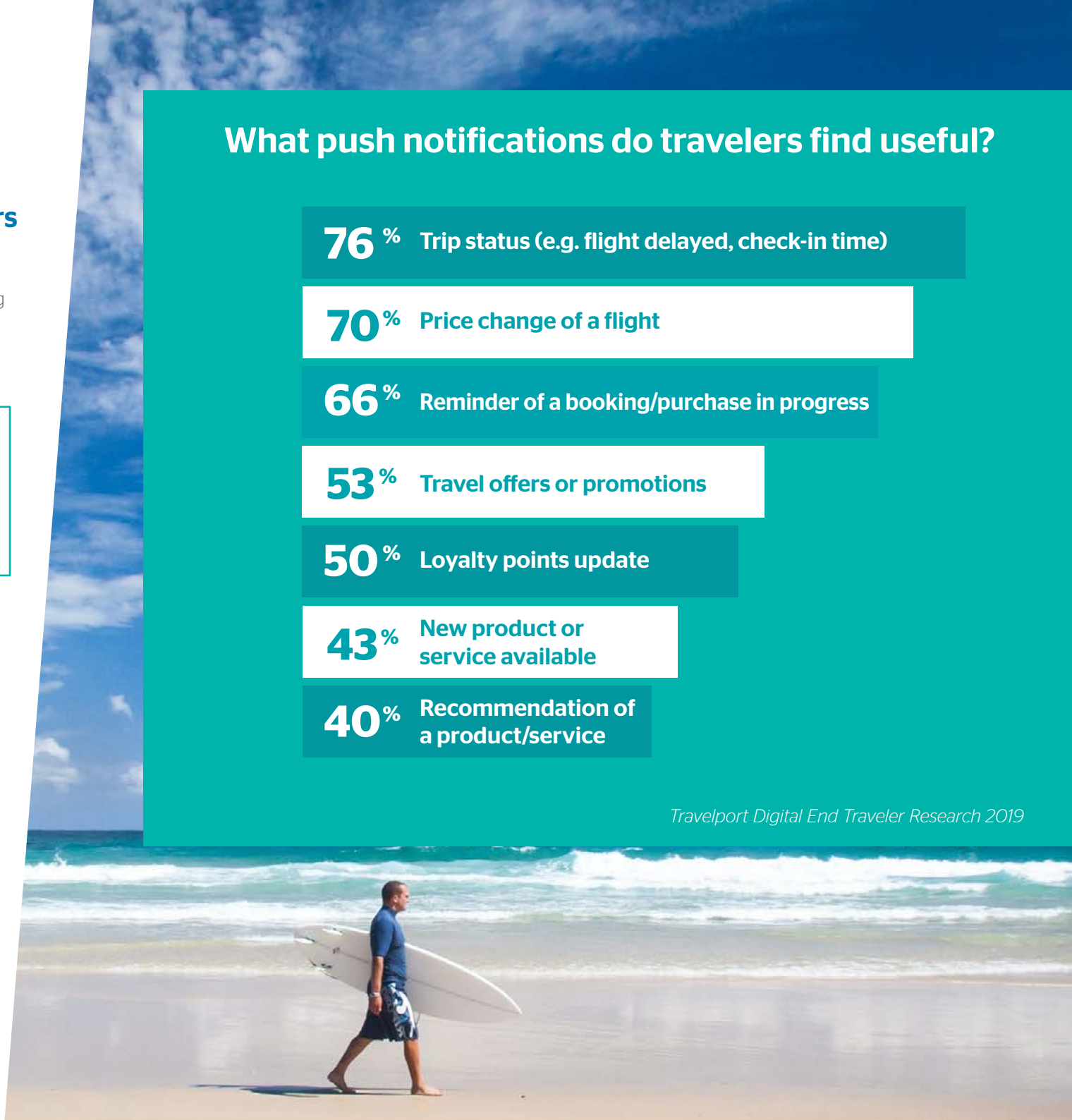
53% Travel offers or promotions

50% Loyalty points update

43% New product or service available

40% Recommendation of a product/service

Travelport Digital End Traveler Research 2019



Apple wallet

Apple Wallet supports boarding passes, loyalty cards, hotel stays, and discount vouchers, as well as event tickets. One of the best things about it is your OTA can start using without having to create a single line of code or having any technical knowledge.

Using Apple Wallet gives you the chance to send push notifications to iPhone users, without needing to have your own iOS app.

The following sites will help you to get up and running:

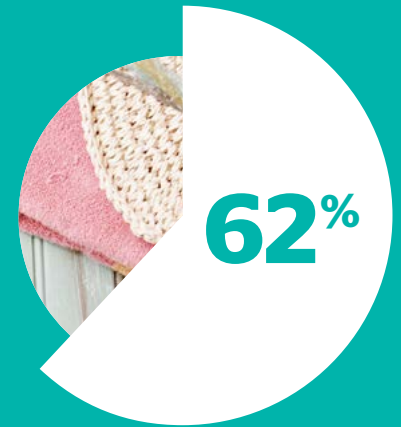
- PassKit
- PassSlot
- PassSource

Pre-trip ancillary upsell

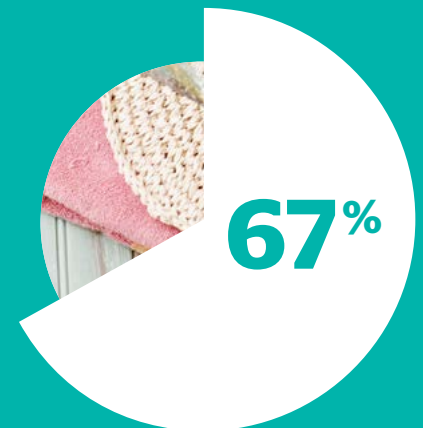
As your traveler's trip draws closer, you can use this pre-trip stage to start filling in any gaps in their itinerary. With an average of 50 days' lead-in time between booking a flight and traveling, there is plenty of time to upsell and cross sell ancillaries like accommodation, flight add-ons, and car hire.

Another area that offers great potential for revenue generation in the pre-trip stage is upselling in-trip activities. Recent research by Phocuswright shows that travel activities account for 8% of US travel gross bookings, totaling \$34 billion in 2018, making this the third biggest travel segment behind flights and accommodation. As travelers become increasingly driven to book trips by the activities they can do in-destination, this number is only set to increase, with the US travel activities market expected to grow to \$42 billion annually by 2022²⁷.

Travelers are highly likely to book ticketed activities that may have limited availability before they travel, like sporting and cultural events. Given the ever-increasing popularity of experience-driven travel, it has never been more important for your OTA to sell content beyond just flights, hotel, and car, and your pre-trip lead in time is the perfect time to push these offers.

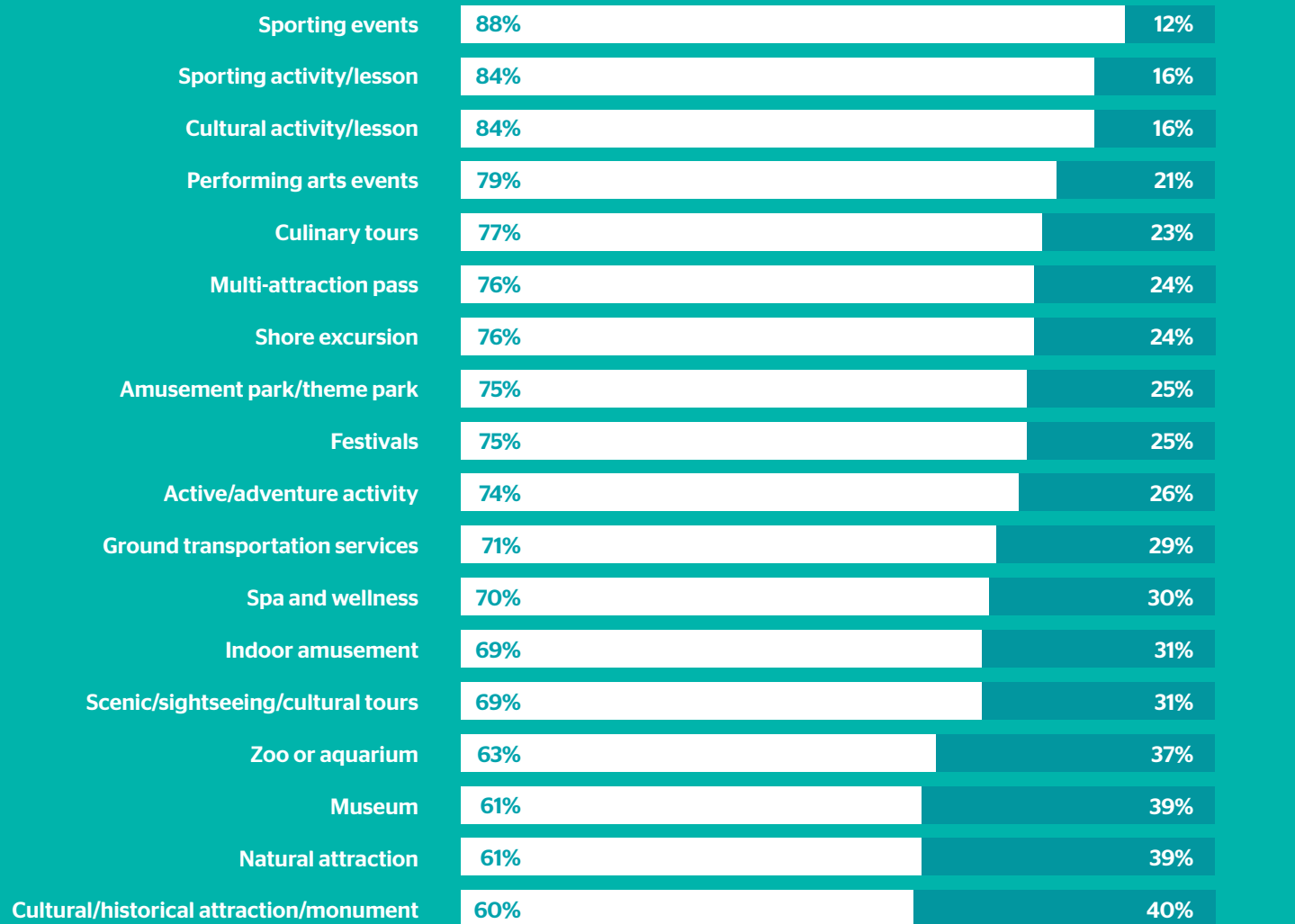


of those who created a user account with an OTA did so manage their itinerary



want flexible payment options from an OTA (e.g. pay a deposit or instalments on a trip)

Booking timeframe of purchase-required travel activities



Pre-trip In destination



Source: Phocuswright - Experiences 2019: US Travel Activities Market Opportunity & Consumer Behavior

In-trip



Inspiration



Shopping



Booking



Pre-trip



In-trip

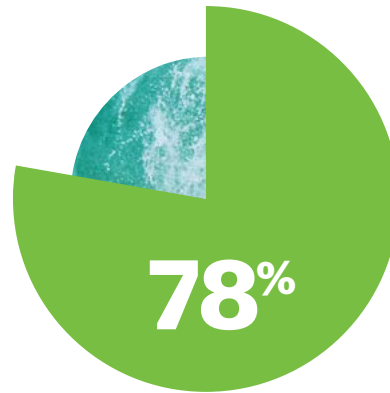


Post-trip

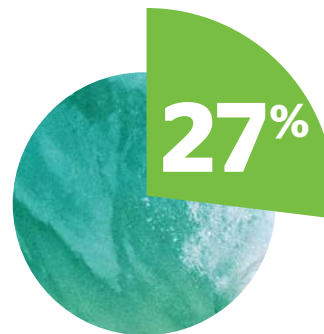
In-trip

The trip has arrived; the stress of searching, comparing, and booking is but a distant memory for your traveler. While the day of travel can bring its own frictions, for the most part the traveler is now open to exploring their destination and is looking for recommendations on what to do and where to go. They want location-specific travel tips, and this is where your OTA can continue to bring value for your customer, as well as boost ancillary revenue.

According to Travelport research, a three-day trip gives your OTA approximately nine new opportunities to shape your customers' experiences and engage with them. On longer trips, those opportunities are multiplied, along with the potential for generating revenue for your business.



of travelers would like location-specific travel tips from OTAs while in their destination



would like to use social channels to chat with an OTA while on a trip

- Conversion of ancillaries (experiences, in-trip activities)

KPIs



Opportunities for in-trip engagement over three days

Day 1

Taxi to airport



Taxi to hotel



Restaurant suggestion



Flight



Hotel check-in ease

Day 2

Tour bus tickets



Spa partner offer



Lunch suggestion



Local show tickets

Day 3

Breakfast suggestion



Flight



Taxi to airport



Taxi home

How to optimize conversions at pre-trip

Guides and recommendations

According to Google research, 85% of leisure travelers decide on activities only after having arrived at their destination²⁸. With the right data, you can target travelers with personalized offers while they are on their trip, allowing you to tap into travelers' holiday spending budgets, which are now worth an average of \$5,000+²⁹.

While some travelers will book in-destination activities in advance of their trip, there is still plenty of opportunity for your OTA to recommend local activities, events, and even restaurants that are targeted towards persona needs and preferences. The goal is to consistently enhance your travelers' experiences, while also opening new revenue streams for your business.

Seventy-eight percent of travelers want OTAs to send location-specific travel tips and 67% of travelers feel more loyal toward a travel company that shares information during their trip that improves their travel experience³⁰.

More than any other stage of the customer journey, in-trip is when travelers will use their mobile devices most. Every touchpoint, every experience the traveler has with your brand, should be mobile-first.

Disruption management

For the most part, the in-trip stage of the customer journey should be the most relaxing for the traveler. However, disruptions happen and the travel brands who deal with these disruptions effectively are the

ones who will build loyalty in the long run. In fact, Google research found that the number one reason high-value customers make repeat booking with travel brands comes down to customer service³¹.

Sending a push notification with flight delay updates, information on what to do or even complimentary airport vouchers allows your OTA to be there for the traveler when the chips are down. It also enables your agency to remain relevant to the traveler and keeps your brand front and central in their minds throughout the trip.

Sending a message with instructions on what to do in the event of travel disruption also helps to reduce the number of customer queries coming through, which frees up your agents' time to deal with more complex issues.

Social media

In-trip is the time where travelers are most likely to take to social media to share their trip experiences. At this point, your agency has an opportunity to engage with these travelers across your social channels. For example, you could offer incentives like extra loyalty points or competition entry for tagging your agency in their posts or using a particular hashtag.

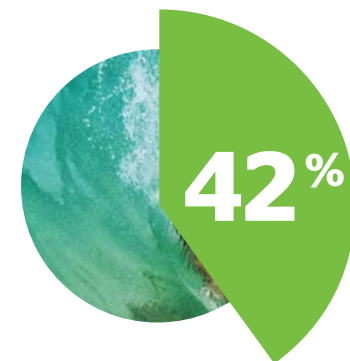
By engaging with travelers on social at the in-trip stage, you can start to tap into viral growth engines, as well as starting to open up a whole new data stream. This in turn could help with targeting relevant engagements and offers to your travelers on social.

The most effective marketing is driven organically from your customers instead of your paid messaging. If your agency can get your customer to share the great experiences and at the same time reference the OTA, it becomes free, yet powerful, marketing.

In-trip assistance

Beyond in-trip guides and recommendations, travelers also expect travel brands to be on-hand to assist with queries while on their trip. Our research shows that 42% of travelers expect to be able to chat with an OTA via their app or website, and 37% expect to be able to chat via text message. More than half of travelers (59%) expect to be able to phone or email an OTA while on their trip.

Incorporating chat services—agent chat, AI-powered chatbots, or a combination of both—provides an efficient way to provide 24/7 service to travelers via their mobile devices. Chatbots can also provide another channel for revenue generation, with some OTAs offering booking services directly from chat platforms like Facebook Messenger. Travelport Digital research also found that 39% of travelers use voice technology during a trip, with 67% wanting to use this technology for trip status related queries.



want to use app or web chat to communicate with OTAs in-trip



Chatbots

Inspiration

European city breaks in Spring



Here's a list of the best destinations to visit in Europe in the Spring...

Shopping

Show me flights to Paris CDG departing on May 1 from London Gatwick



No problem. Here are the flights available from London Gatwick to Paris CDG on those dates...

Booking

I want to book a hotel in Paris for tonight



Here are available hotel rooms in Paris for tonight...

Pre-trip

What gate will my flight depart from today?



Your flight will depart from gate A32

In-trip

I need to cancel my hotel last minute. Can I get a refund?



We're going to hand you over to one of our agents to deal with your query, just a moment please!

Post-trip

Hi there, hope you enjoyed your trip to Paris! Don't forget to rate your experience with us...



Post-trip



Inspiration



Shopping



Booking



Pre-trip



In-trip



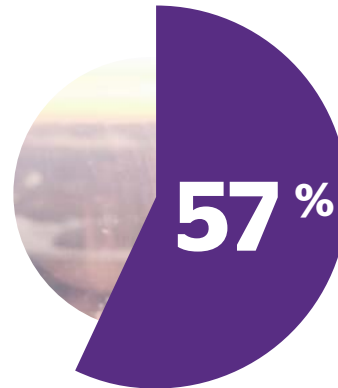
Post-trip

Post-trip

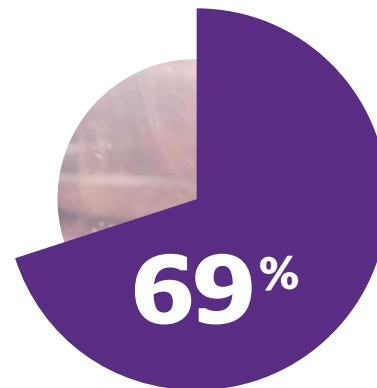
Most agencies still focus on selling a single trip to a traveler, with no plan for what happens next. However, to build longer-lasting, more profitable relationships, you need to have a lifetime plan for each and every customer you engage with. Just as Amazon recommends what products we may be interested in based on our previous purchases, OTAs can also use similar data and persona driven insights to inform the suggestions on where the next trip will be.

By understanding customers' changing needs and building personalized offers and marketing plans, previous return-on-trip measures of success will become a thing of the past. Instead, we will be working towards a return-on-customer model where you retain customers and win their loyalty over an entire lifetime of travel.

The key to delivering this vision is to engage with customers post-trip to understand their detailed feedback about their search, booking, pre-trip, and travel experiences. Based on this feedback, and a range of other insights, you can build a trusted customer profile that can help you stay relevant as their personal situation and travel needs change.



would leave a review with an OTA if incentivized (e.g. loyalty points)



say loyalty programs would influence them to book another trip with an OTA

- Collection of customer data to build profiles
- NPS
- CPA (per channel)
- Customer retention

KPIs



How to optimize conversions post-trip

Loyalty

What is loyalty in a travel and how is it measured? When we think of the tactics OTAs use to inspire loyalty in travelers, rewards or membership programs are top of the list. After all, 91% of OTAs have loyalty programs according to Expedia research³². However, there is much more to loyalty than rewards points and there are a number of key factors that will encourage a customer to book another trip with your OTA

Aside from the obvious factor of price, travelers tell us that having the ability to book an entire trip in one place would encourage them to re-book with an OTA. The value of a convenient and user-friendly experience can't be underestimated; while 73% want to be able to book an end-to-end trip in one place, 70% also tell us that a good mobile experience would encourage loyalty when it comes to re-booking with an OTA.

Of course, loyalty programs have their part to play in increasing your returning customers. 69% say loyalty points and rewards programs would influence them to book another trip with the same OTA.

Three tips for your OTA's loyalty program

- * **Make it mobile:** More than half of travelers think it's important to have access to their loyalty program via a travel app³⁸, so make sure your program is optimized for mobile.
- * **Personalize:** As with every step of the customer journey, personalization is critical when it comes to loyalty. There is no one-size-fits-all approach and you need to use your traveler persona insights to create truly personalized offers and experiences through your loyalty program.
- * **Communicate:** Keep your loyalty program front of mind by communicating its benefits regularly. Half of travelers find push notifications related to loyalty programs useful³⁹ and 58% would like to get points updates via an OTA's newsletter.



Make it mobile



Personalize



Communicate

What makes a traveler book another trip with the same OTA?

83% Price

73% Ability to book entire trip (flight, hotel, in-trip excursions etc.) in one place

70% A good mobile experience (e.g. useful app features, easy to use)

69% Loyalty/rewards program points or awards

60% Personalized travel suggestions based on previous trips/searches

49% Having my payment details stored on my profile



Feedback

Once the trip is done, one of your key priorities should be collecting feedback from your travelers.

This feedback should relate to:

- * **The service the traveler received from your OTA (customer surveys)**
- * **Their flight, hotel, and in-trip experiences (customer reviews)**

Collecting this valuable data will not only allow you to measure your NPS score and provide feedback to your suppliers, it will also allow you to feature user generated content like traveler reviews across your website; an essential step in inspiring travelers on their first step of their next journey.

When it comes to getting the right feedback, timing is everything. Asking for feedback a month after a traveler returns from their trip will be of little value; you need to gather these insights soon after an event has taken place. For example:

- * **Feature a short survey on your app or website after the booking flow to find out more about the user experience**
- * **Send a push notification after a flight has landed inviting traveler feedback**
- * **You could even use geolocation targeting to send a push notification after a traveler has checked out of a hotel and is on their way to the airport to ask for feedback on the trip.**

When and how you ask for feedback should form a core part of your traveler communication strategy. You can also offer incentives to encourage traveler feedback: 57% of travelers say they would leave feedback if they could get extra loyalty points for doing so.

Re-convert

While post-trip is the last step in a traveler's journey, it is not so for your OTA. You have now built up a bank of insights with your traveler's booking history, preferences, personal profile, and behaviors; all of which will be essential in re-inspiring your customer on their next journey.

By constantly enriching your traveler persona profiles with data, you will be armed with the intelligence to inspire, excite, and engage your customers. One way many OTAs do this is by sending newsletters to generate new bookings; however, it is essential that these newsletters are as personalized as possible.

In our research with OTA end travelers, we asked them the information they would be most interested in receiving in an OTA newsletter. Special offers and discounts are favored by 73% of respondents, which shows the immense potential for re-converting customers through this channel. Almost half of respondents would also like to receive trip inspiration based on their personalized preferences.



Information travelers want to receive in an OTA's newsletter

73% Special offers/discounts

58% Loyalty program update
/points balance

47% Trip inspiration
based on personalized
preferences

40% Information on
new products
/services



Conclusion

Optimizing conversion across the customer journey is an ongoing process. As travelers increasingly demand personalized, always-on experiences, the opportunities to convert and generate revenue will only continue to grow for online travel agencies. What will truly differentiate your OTA from the competition is how you collect, analyze, and use customer data to create these personalized experiences.

It is no longer enough to focus on converting lookers to bookers; booking is just one part of the overall picture. From inspiring website visitors with great content, to offering them relevant search results, to upselling useful ancillaries and providing the best pre, in, and post-trip customer service, there is so much more to optimizing conversion than achieving bookings. The OTAs who will see the most success aren't the ones who offer the best price: they are the ones who offer the best overall, end-to-end experience. The experience is everything.

As you work your way through your own customer journey maps, remember to integrate closely with your data team, whether that's in-house or a third party supplier. Because with the right data and analytics strategy, you can transcend the traditional travel agency business to offer much greater value for your customers during every stage of their travel experience. Beyond this, you can create a plan for every single customer relationship, generating returns that—in some cases—literally last a lifetime.

Sources

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About Travelport

Travel is a \$7 trillion industry - and Travelport is at its heart, powering the experiences that the world's leading travel companies provide. Our platform enables travel providers, travel agencies, corporations and developers to search, share, buy and sell travel. We connect the world's leading travel providers with online and offline buyers in a proprietary B2B travel marketplace.

In 2018, our Travelport systems processed:

- * Approximately \$89 billion of travel spending
- * Over 4 trillion messages passed over our networks; approx. 11 billion air shopping requests per month
- * Over 335 million segments sold by travel agencies including:
 - Over 107 million car rental days
 - Approximately 67 million hotel room nights
 - 45 hospitality segments per 100 air tickets sold

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