



GOOGLE URGES AIRLINES TO REAP REWARDS FROM MOBILE DISRUPTION

News / Airlines



, encouraged airlines to embrace mobile and the opportunities created by disruption, and the growth of mobile.

"In the airline industry we think about disruption in a bad sense. My flight was disrupted and my bag was lost, [it's a] bad experience for our passengers. But there's also something to do [with disruption] to minimize the costs for our businesses," Friesen said. "What about disruption as an opportunity?"

Friesen presented examples of positive disruptions in industries like high-end fashion and music, which share parallels with aviation in their high barriers to entry and the dominant presence of legacy brands.

"[They've] been around for decades, and they think they are kind of immune to this sort of disruption. However, some people do see opportunities there," he said.

Those opportunities, Friesen suggests open up through adoption of mobile technology and

personalized distribution systems.

"The travel journey is incredibly complicated. The way people are booking their travel is even more so," he said. "Our recent study..shows that, on average, in the UK, people visit 32 different sites before booking their travel, which is an incredible number, and incredibly complex."

Friesen presented a chart of Google's findings that show passengers make 32.5 visits to 10.3 websites in 4.2 categories before booking.

Personalized Searches

Friesen suggested that solutions-oriented queries, ones that look at the big picture of the intent of the trip, better engage consumers, encouraging them to make the purchase, and building positive associations with the brand.

"Personalization is more than a more than just merchandising faster; it's about creating a great experience and making the user love your brand," he said.

"However, if you look at many airline websites right now you'll see a one-size-fits-all approach," Friesen said. "If you're a young person booking an online trip for a bunch of different cities for a backpacking holiday, or if you're a business person looking for a same-day journey to Geneva and want to be back in time to have dinner at home, you're getting practically the same experience. Some airlines have experimented with merchandising and unbundling. In fact, one booking for Middle Eastern markets has twelve fare classes. This isn't personalization from the customer's perspective. It's personalization from the airline's perspective. What are we addressing that's a customer need?"

He used the example of Vamo's smart trip search, recently acquired by Airbnb, which finds the optimal offers for travelers among all airlines and hotels, and puts together a suggested itinerary. "This technology already exists," he said. "There are airlines that can already do this."

Where We Jet

Friesen said some airlines are picking up on the importance of inspiring travel through content, and converting that inspiration to bookings. Google finds travel inspiration is critically important.

"We know that 54% of people, when they sit down to book their travel, don't have a destination in mind," Friesen said. "So how can we inspire them to go to a destination that we work with? JetBlue in the U.S. actually worked with Google Maps to come up with a new query map tool called Where We Jet. Now, not only can you see where JetBlue flies on this map, you can also filter by weather, nightlife, romance or beach, and once you pick your destination you can use the million plus points-of-interest on Google maps to find points-of-interest, activities, or restaurants, and plan your trip from there. This is a win-win for everybody. It's a win for the consumer because they get valuable information to customize their journey. It's a win for the airline because they spend more time on your site, and they're more likely to book with you."

While crediting some airlines, like JetBlue, with exploring creative solutions, Friesen said many others are missing opportunities. "I think relative to other industries and other travel sectors [airlines] are actually quite far behind," he said.

Smart Mobility

Friesen urged travel brands to develop user-friendly mobile platforms, saying, "Mobile is changing

the way we travel more than any technology has since the Internet."

In a separate presentation, Lufthansa reported at the Congress that 80% of Asian travelers are planning their trips on mobile phones. Friesen reported that 35% of people searching for airline tickets, in the UK, do so on their mobile devices.

The growth of mobile, Friesen says, has prompted Google making mobile solutions developments a priority. But just as with desktop platforms, Friesen suggests that personalized, contextualized interfaces are critical to uptake.

"If we look at a simple query, like 'breakfast', over the past five years the search has slowly but steadily increased, but if we instead look at queries like 'breakfast near me' we can see a many-fold higher increase in people [using the search term] staring back two or three years ago; which corresponds with when smartphones became really big and people started accessing their phones in new and interesting ways."

Contextual Searches

Responding to growth in mobile searches, Google has introduced smart searches through Google Now, and has improved the use of contextual data with Google Now On Tap. "Data will pull all of these together to help make the best possible customer journey," he said.

"[Contextual journey] information is not only going to live in Google Now, but it will be extended into all the apps in your phone."

With Google Now On Tap, for example, friends chatting on a messenger app about an upcoming vacation can pull up relevant information on the destination from Google On Tap and make the booking directly on Google On Tap.

"This is how Google is looking at getting contextual signals from mobile, the intent and the information that people are looking for on their devices," Friesen said.

Friesen suggests that airlines monetize data with services that fit the needs of passengers at the right place and time, partnering providers of relevant services with shared revenues for bookings. As an example, he suggested airlines could use passenger and flight data to arrange an Uber pick-up for passengers just in time for arrival.

"That's the kind of experience that gives me positive feelings about my brand, makes the passenger experience better, gets me home on time for dinner and is also potentially a revenue stream for the airline," he said.

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