The travel report

Contents

Introduction

Fasten your seatbelts

A dynamic market

Over the past decade, the number of flights taken by people from the UK has risen by nearly a quarter. A staggering 160 million passengers take to the skies from Britain each year, which is more than in any other time in history. On the face of it, the travel industry is in rude health.

But more brands than ever now compete for consumers' spend. These include traditional high street travel agents (like recently rebranded TUI), online travel agencies (such as Booking.com and Expedia), aggregator and metasearch sites (like Kayak and Skyscanner), as well as airlines, airports and hotel chains.

Waves of disruption

Over the last 25 years, the sector has undergone successive waves of disruption. Before the World Wide Web, it was a highly mediated market, with consumers shopping through travel agents. Then, growth in internet penetration allowed consumers to go direct to hotels, airlines and other service providers. Whilst this brought a level of freedom and choice that traditional agents couldn't offer, it also came at a price. The consumer now had to bear the co-ordination cost (time, hassle) of arranging each element of their trip and dealing with each individual supplier. Fast forward to now, the middleman business model is back in fashion.

Many brands are attempting to become a platform or a 'one stop shop' for everything a traveller needs – offering joined up choices, convenience and ease, and a personalised service. By developing all-encompassing services, these brands are aiming to win by having the majority share of consumers' attention, data and spend.

Sector analysis

Over the last quarter, we've analysed how the travel market continues to change and examined what brands need to do to maintain their relevance. We've explored Ryanair's ambition to become the 'Amazon of travel'; the threat Google poses to the market; how airports and airlines can improve their customer experience and drive their revenues; and how serverless technology can transform a company's development process.

Brand leaders' event

To get the brand view, we also hosted a breakfast event where we facilitated a lively panel debate with leaders from Japan Airlines, Holiday Extras, Eurostar, Trainline and Bristol Airport. These brands, and others, have contributed to the discussion by sharing the experiences and challenges they're facing within their own organisations.

The consumer perspective

In addition to this, we've conducted some quantitative research, asking 1,154 UK holidaymakers for their point of view on the travel service and experience provided by brands. We explored loyalty and trust, including which brands they considered most reliable and reputable, to reach an understanding of their expectations and help identify the frustrations and improvements which could make all the difference to their journey.

We're delighted to share our insights with you in this exclusive report of our journey through the sector.

Mediated
Travel agents
= No choice

Disintermediated
OTAs and aggregators
= Fragmented

Mediated again
Joined up services
= Friction free

Our view

In-depth studies on improving brand relevance in travel

Our travel insights

We have explored three in-depth viewpoints on the travel market for improving brand relevance and business performance through digital technology.

Brands can establish long term growth by improving the customer experience and making digital services available end-to-end.

Where do you start and what's right for your brand?

One
Ryanair's bid to be the Amazon of travel

Two
Making the connection between airports and airlines

Three
Tech to enable your brand to travel faster and cheaper

1

Ryanair's bid to be the Amazon of travel

Ryanair is already the largest airline in Europe – and the fifth largest on the planet - but it has aspirations far beyond this. Is it really set up to be a one stop shop for travel or is it chasing a losing battle?

Despite revealing the worst gender pay gap in the airline industry, and on top of its infamous cancellation of the flights of nearly **700,000** passengers, Ryanair's fortunes seemingly are flying high. But, with an increasing array of competitors vying to own the leisure traveller, we have analysed exactly how airlines like Ryanair need to improve their customer experience in order to stay relevant.

Google Flights

Negative
26%

Positive
84%

Ryanair Flights

Negative
49%

Positive
51%

Ryanair has provocatively declared its intent to become the 'Amazon of travel'. Yet its business model has historically relied on friction to drive revenue, polarising with Amazon's friction-reducing one.

It's no wonder that whilst Amazon tops the UK Customer Satisfaction Index, Ryanair doesn't even make the top 50. Between January 2017 and January 2018, Ryanair suffered the biggest fall in satisfaction of all airlines included in the UK Customer Satisfaction Index.

Ryanair's ambition is a noble one but unless it improves its customer experience, it's more likely to disappoint than delight through an expanded range of services.

Google, with its spread of products and services across the customer journey, is best placed to deliver the joined up, personalised AI-driven customer experience of the future.

Google Flights, for example, generates significantly higher positive sentiment than Ryanair (Source: social analysis by Great State).
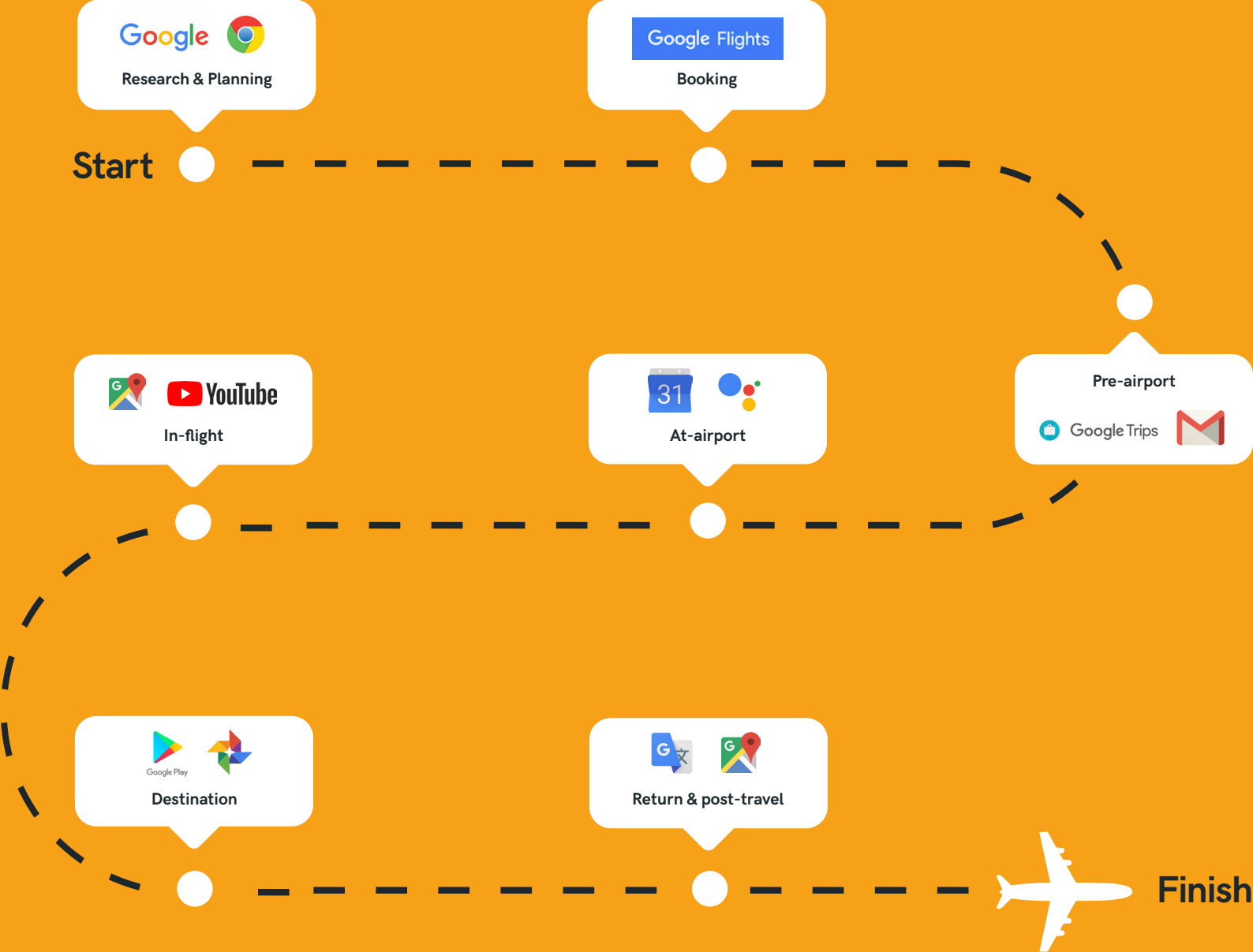
> **"We want to become the go-to place for all travel needs. We're going to be a travel business that happens to have an airline at its centre."**
>
> **Kenny Jacobs**
> **CMO, Ryanair**

It's easy to imagine a joined-up 'Google Travel' experience and what the future of customer experience might look like for the leisure traveller.

Google | **Research & Planning**

Google Flights | **Booking**

Start

YouTube | **In-flight**

31 | **At-airport**

Pre-airport | **Google Trips**

Google Play | **Destination**

Return & post-travel

Finish

2

Making the connection between airports and airlines

Travellers experience a consolidation of what multiple travel brands provide. Whether from airlines, the airport or other entities, the customer experience is viewed as one. How much of the Stansted experience, for example, is down to the airport or the carriers and how can that overall experience be best improved?

Commonly airlines hold a tight grip on customer data and don't share it with airports. Yet there is an opportunity to share with mutual benefit.

We chose two specific areas where small improvements to the customer experience could have a significant commercial benefit for both airports and airlines.

Incentives for early arrival

A more positive and productive airport experience, aided by digital technology, would encourage people to get there early. If you could access exclusive areas of the departure lounge, workspaces, high speed WiFi and in-airport entertainment, would you avoid a last minute rush?

Dynamic in-airport services

Personalised in-airport upgrades and services can add delight and increase revenues. Fast track security, food delivery, gyms and Amazon lockers all exist in some airports already but not always via mobile apps and never through a single app.

A unified smartphone app would enable both airports and airlines to earn greater revenue per passenger, better customer satisfaction and ultimately greater customer loyalty.

▲ **10%**
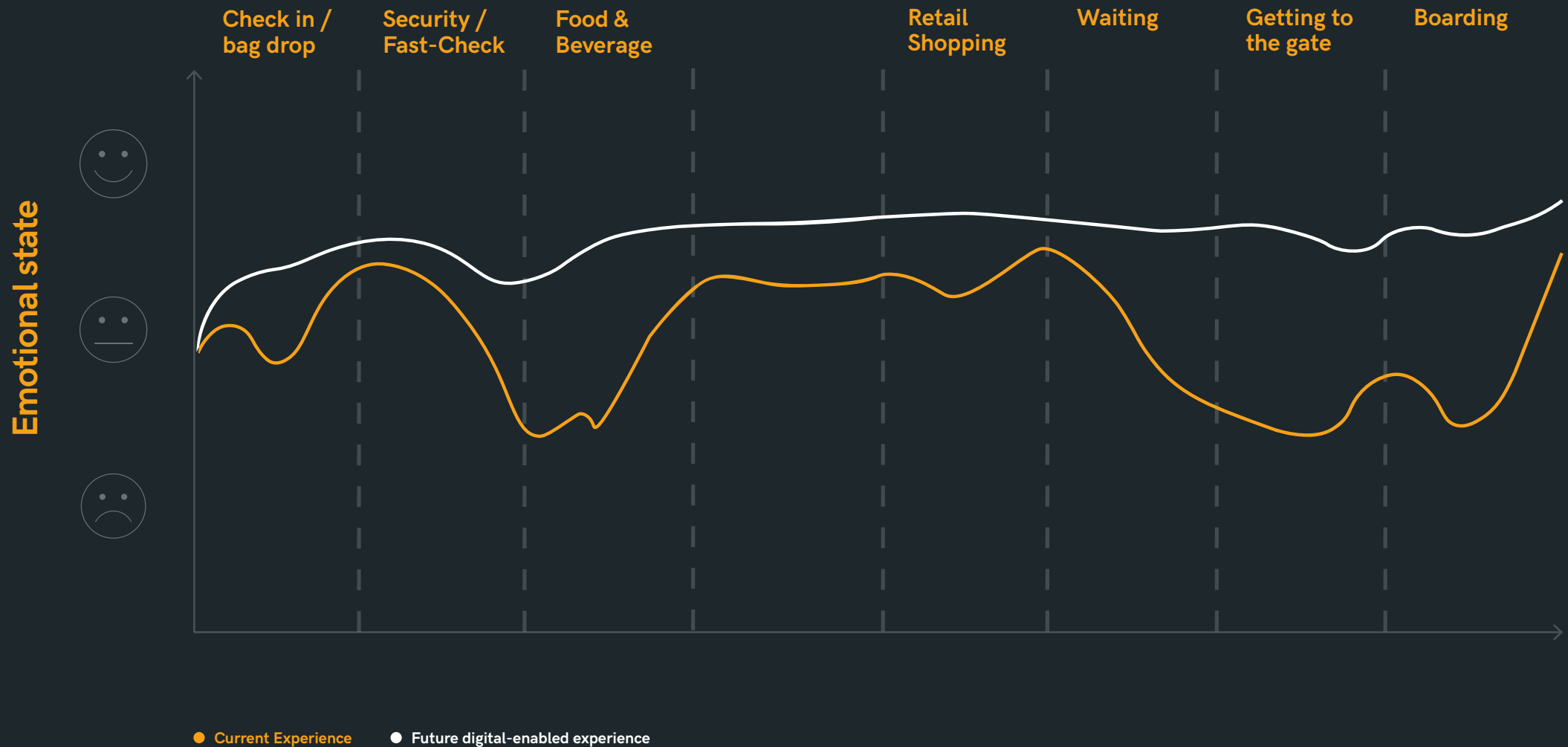**Time spent by satisfied customers**

▲ **100%**
Propensity to shop by satisfied passengers

Source: DKMA

Airport experience

Below shows the emotional state of passengers throughout the in-airport experience today and how it could be transformed through a unified digital platform.

Emotional state

Check in / bag drop

Security / Fast-Check

Food & Beverage

Retail Shopping

Waiting

Getting to the gate

Boarding

● Current Experience   ● Future digital-enabled experience

3

Tech to enable your brand to travel faster and cheaper

Serverless technology has been touted as a game-changing technology that can deliver cost and time efficiencies to businesses in all sectors, but it's not easy to understand its value.

Serverless abstracts developers from server complexity so that they can focus more of their effort on logic to add business value.

In travel, driving efficiencies can make the difference between flying high and running to the ground.

Ryanair is the ultimate efficiency-driving travel brand, notoriously cutting the frills to keep prices low. Unlike Amazon, Google and Expedia, Ryanair have yet to realise the true value of the cloud, serverless technology and the positive impact they can have on teams.

Higher infrastructure cost; lower people cost

Serverless costs even more than a cloud server. The business case on the surface doesn't stack up. One benefit, however, is that you're billed only for the exact amount of processing and storage you use. Secondly, without the need to manage servers, we see product teams create infrastructure in seconds and deliver solutions in hours with up to an **80%** reduction in operation costs.

Ryanair's IT transformation and team fragmentation

Ryanair stated in May 2018 that it is fully embracing the cloud, years after the likes of Expedia.

Ryanair began their digital revamp in 2014 after realising that customers would no longer tolerate sub-standard digital products.

While they have made significant progress, they are segregating rather than connecting departments, adding friction and slowing growth.

Small, multi-discipline, collaborative teams

Ryanair needs to bring business functions together and align people in teams with shared goals and the right mix to bring value to customers.

Serverless will let them move quickly, bringing business value to market faster and cheaper. Increasing data collection, Machine Learning and new ways of developing software will emerge to exploit this technology to drive even more operational cost savings.

Evolving from a traditional, heavy IT team to small **multi-discipline teams**

IT

Marketing

Finance
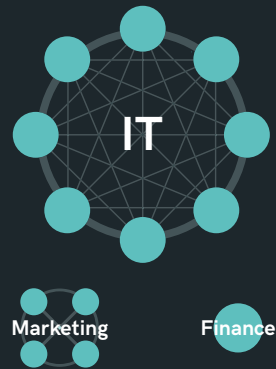
Traditional model with large IT team of specialists including server management

IT

Marketing

Finance
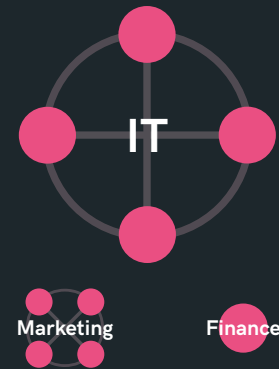
Serverless model with smaller IT team but still separation of departments

IT, marketing and finance

Multi-discipline, collaborative, "two-pizza" teams

The industry perspective

Insights and interviews from leading travel brands
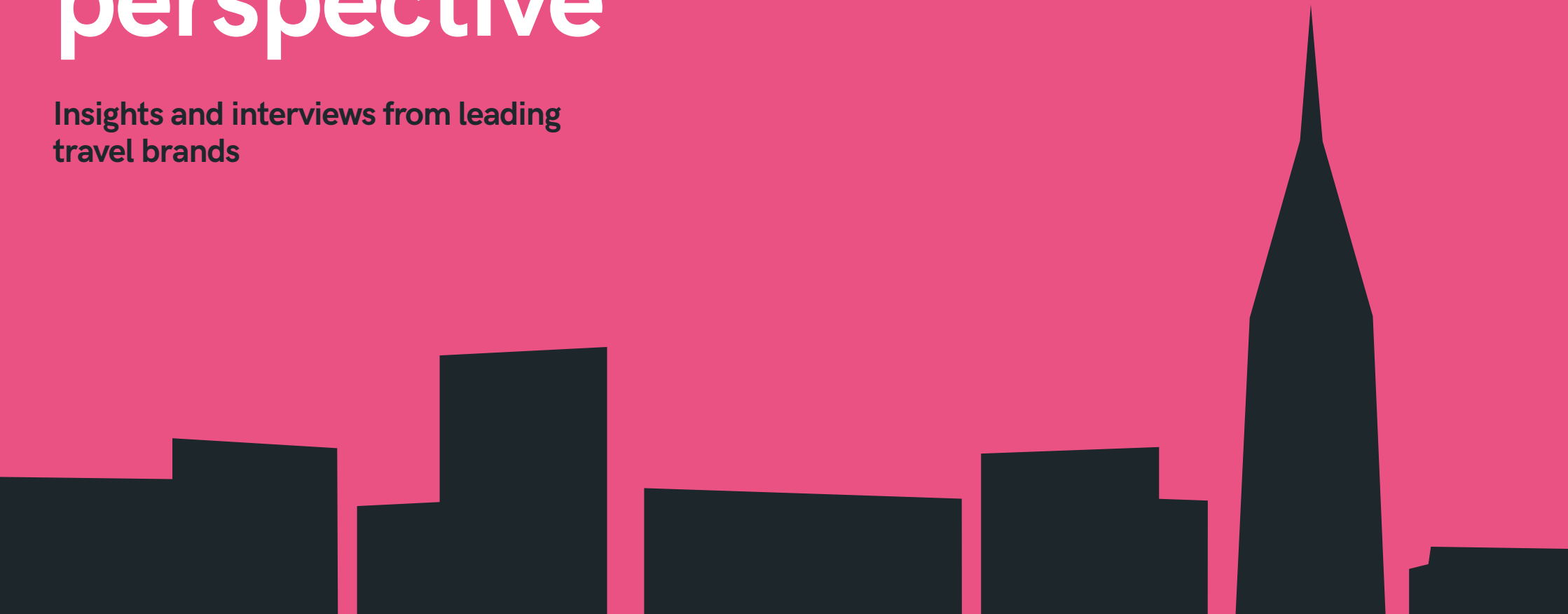
The battle to own the travel consumer

At a recent seminar, we cast a spotlight on the travel sector, with a focus on the very real battle to win over today's increasingly demanding consumers. The session involved a mix of discussion and a panel Q&A, delivering key insights from the frontline.

Designed to offer a forum for senior executives to discuss their own experiences and challenges, it featured a panel of brand leaders presenting their view. The panel was broad and multi modal, with representatives from airlines, airports, train operators, aggregators and suppliers:

- Bristol Airport
- Eurostar
- Holiday Extras
- Japan Airlines
- Trainline

Growing share of the customer

It was collectively acknowledged that today, a brand's ambition lies in owning more of its customers. This is evident through the ever-increasing development of services and experiences that maximise the customer's time, data and spend. In a bid to steal attention, experiences need to become more compelling for them to stand out.

Those experiences that rise to the top are underpinned by three core principles:

- Seamlessness
- Friction free
- Data driven

The industry view. Key themes from the event

27

Key themes

1. Seamlessness
Forget the on and offline divide

From the early stages of considering a trip to opening the front door back home, a customer will encounter multiple brands, services and products, all designed to make their trip better.

Customers want an overall positive joined up experience regardless of who is responsible for each stage. The lines of on and offline don't exist, interactions should be seamless.

Bristol Airport's Nigel Scott ardently championed the need to embrace relationships with partners to deliver more seamless experiences.

2. Friction free
Alleviate pain points

Travelling can be stressful enough even when things are running smoothly, so any disruptive element can cause great friction. There was huge importance placed on the need to alleviate pain points before anything else. If an experience has moments of 'pain' those will be remembered before any elements of delight.

The panel and attendees agreed that in delivering a 'pain free experience' the key challenge is deciding where and how you begin.

3. Data driven
Use data to customers' advantage

The need to capture information about customers is high on the agenda whether it be their purchase preferences, location or social commentary. However what needs to be considered is why the data is being collected and what it will ultimately be used for.

Eurostar's Matt Lovell highlighted the importance of ensuring your data is connected in the right way to support customers.

The industry view. Key themes from the event

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Panel
deep dive

Building from the principles outlined in the session, each panellist took the time to elaborate on, and highlight how, their individual organisation was navigating the current landscape.

Nigel Scott
Business Development Director, Bristol Airport

Matt Lovell
Head of Data, Analytics and Insight, Eurostar

Anthony Clarke-Cowell
Associate Communications Director, Holiday Extras

Andrew Grodecki
General Manager, Japan Airlines, UK and Ireland

Ian Randolph
Product Owner, Data Science, Personalisation and Ancillary, Trainline

Nigel Scott

Business Development Director, Bristol Airport

Scott underlined the importance of adopting the customers' mindset when it comes to delivering a seamless experience: "you have to think about it from a customer's perspective. They don't care who does what – it's all the travel experience". The result is the need to foster, strong working relationships with everyone across the journey.

Build strong partner relations

At Bristol Airport there's an open desire to work increasingly closely with partners, for the benefit of their customers. "We have to work together… historically we've seen jostling for position with the view - 'it's my customer' - and I think that is a bit of a red herring. Ultimately the likes of Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook know more about me than an airport or an airline will ever know. The danger is if the airport and the airline become sidelined by not working effectively together, you literally become like St Pancras station - providing the platform and everything else being effectively done by someone else".

Future opportunity

Scott felt that working more closely goes some way to managing the threat from organisations like Google but it is also allows his team to develop more friction free experiences by collectively pooling data with partners. "At the moment we share a lot of information, we are working on several technical solutions, i.e. self-bag drops for all airlines and the very interesting auto-boarding. This is where you could potentially use facial recognition or some other form of biometric data to allow you to board the plane without having to show your passport. It would mean easing the process further, reducing queues and leaving the consumer more in control of their time in the airport".

> **'Adopt the customer's mindset"**

Matt Lovell

Head of Data, Analytics & Insight, Eurostar

Lovell has been quick to identify where value can be added to deliver a better experience. He is especially focused on bringing together data specialists and driving transparency of data sources across the company.

Customer need is paramount

"In order to provide an optimal service, we need to consider what we need to offer our customers.. then we build the team and skills around those needs. By better understanding them, we can work towards alleviating the pain points. For example, we know that real time information is imperative, especially when there is disruption, but a lot of our processes are batch processes, so we only receive data at the end of the day. How do we solve this?"

Lovell's plan is to open up data, not access to it, but through the people and processes that surround it. "People talk about 'data lakes', but that isn't realistic, often you try that approach but getting access to that data is problematic or isn't possible".

> **"We need to shape our technical solutions around our customers' needs not vice versa"**

Invest in people first

To address this issue, he recently set up a 'data guild' – "for us currently, it isn't about investing in new technology it's about how we get people together. How do we build a common thread between everyone around data?". The guild is designed to identify anyone at Eurostar who has data skills and is involved with data.

With increased visibility of people and process Lovell can identify training and knowledge gaps, "it's about breaking down the siloes to deliver great experiences. You need to start internally and build knowledge and expertise within the organisation to be able to make the most of your data – the ultimate benefit being to the customer".

His future ambition is to have a joined up picture of the organisation's data so that they no longer have to "rely as heavily on manual interventions at the point of disruption. Technology should be simpler, so the journey is pain free".

Anthony Clarke-Cowell

Associate Communications Director, Holiday Extras

As an aggregator Holiday Extras understand the importance of managing partner relationships that are "mutually beneficial", enabling them to deliver the "widest range of products" and best experience for their customers.

Deep dive to deliver

A spate of recent acquisitions has underlined Holiday Extras' commitment to making that end to end journey as "hassle free as possible". Optimisation is key for Clarke-Cowell: "we are absolutely committed to get as deep into the consumer journey as possible.

We want to be there, when a customer says – 'I'm planning a trip'. We want them to come to us and support them through the journey.

As well as having a diverse product offering, it's also about improving. Our acquisitions aren't about moving into new markets we're just deepening our involvement into existing ones at this stage".

In doing this they want to again alleviate those pain points so that travellers can return to the joy and excitement that is associated with travel.

Brand challenge

Going deeper into the customer journey involves sustaining strong partner relationships, which Clarke-Cowell knows is key to deliver value for the customer. However, Holiday Extras is also keen to push their own brand, he states that they internally consider themselves "the biggest company you've never heard of" and that is down to their continued commitment to support the retail trade. He acknowledges that one of the biggest challenges ahead is striking the right balance between organisational brand growth and partner relations.

> "We are absolutely committed to get as deep into the consumer journey as possible"

Andrew Grodecki

General Manager, Japan Airlines, UK & Ireland

Having worked in the airline industry for the last 25 years, Grodecki states there is one thing you can't be and that's complacent. "The sector is always evolving and as such you continually have to work hard for your customers".

Choice paralysis

Today, there is such a profusion of different types of carriers, low cost, long haul, short haul. They all require a wide range of facilities. JAL itself offers a diverse product range, from first class to economy".

With such a plethora of choice Grodecki remarked that "travellers have more choice than they've ever had before. I think sometimes it can be quite a confusing landscape for them to navigate".

Understand customer preference

Whilst being a strong advocate of choice, "OTAs, trade, meta search they all have a place" he is well aware that in order to deliver a consistent and seamless experience relationships with partners is key. "We have a wide range of clients and we know that they interact with us in different ways, therefore our partners like British Airways or Iberia are exceptionally important, as for some, they are the main point of contact at some stages through their journey.

We have to get these relationship right to deliver a seamless experience to our end clients".

> "We have an agnostic distribution strategy… we believe in offering people choice"

Ian Randolph

Product Owner, Data Science Personalisation & Ancillary, Trainline

Trainline's digital maturity and adoption of the Evolutionary-Teal management style have seen leaps forward in its product and service offering over the past couple of years. Randolph has championed the alleviation of pain before delighting consumers.

Focus on pain points to bring delight

Randolph's desire is to "bring back the magic to trains". He is passionate about "removing pain from customer experiences before adding delight". His team do this by embracing agile and putting customer feedback at the centre of product design, "there is something noble about reducing pain and having constant conversations with customers makes that very real".

Trainline's approach to alleviating those pain points is to deep dive into one vertical and work strictly within those parameters. For instance, in developing the first m-ticket for the UK, the team worked on one route, between two stations with one provider. "It's about starting small to unlock the big vision". Only when the friction has been removed can it be rolled out more widely.

> "We want to solve problems that haven't been solved before"

Consider customer need before technology

Randolph is also very clear when it comes to new uses of data and technology – "solve problems that haven't been solved before" and don't simply focus on a new front-end delivery method. For example, Voice: "with the diversity of preferences and multitude of ticket options a chatbot would prove less useful initially for complex tasks like choosing the right tickets and more useful for simpler tasks like checking train times. It was only with the development of subsequent technology that voice can deliver a much more nuanced service for these simple tasks" and that was the catalyst to launch their app for Google Assistant late last year when others in market had launched much earlier. The app is also making smart use of data by employing AI with Trainline's ability to scan Twitter. By using natural language processing, they can tell a passenger the reason for their delay and add it to the voice app – all adding value to the service delivered and reducing the friction and frustration delays cause.

Key take outs from our experts:

One
Build strong partner relations

Two
Invest in your own people first

Three
Dive deep into the customer journey

Four
Too much choice can = paralysis

Five
Focus on delivering a seamless experience

The customer voice

The following findings are from our recent Travel Survey, where we uncover why UK holidaymakers are so disloyal and what travel brands can do to keep them.

Understanding the UK's holidaymakers

A staggering growth in demand for air travel is fuelling huge competition amongst an increasingly wide array of travel brands, who are all vying for a greater share of the holidaymaker's wallet.

Having looked at the supply side of the industry (how brands are responding to increasing competition and demand), we've now decided to investigate the UK holidaymakers' point of view.

Our Travel Survey, conducted in September, engaged **1,154 UK residents**, all of whom holiday at least once a year. In this section, we share some key findings from the survey.

52% of consumers are not loyal to specific travel brands

The loyalty challenge

Our research reveals a startling lack of brand loyalty when booking a holiday, with few consumers consistently booking with the same provider.

Only 19% of UK holidaymakers always book with the same provider. And over half (52%) never book with the same provider, whilst a quarter only do 'some of the time'. This lack of loyalty is most evident amongst those in higher income brackets, with almost three quarters of those earning over £65,000 saying they never book with the same provider consistently.
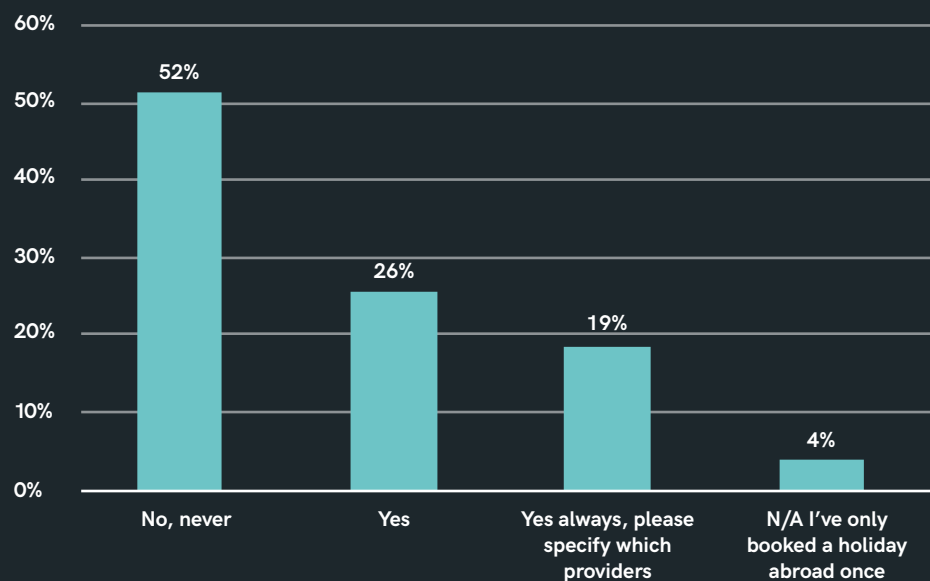
Interestingly, another particularly fickle demographic are consumers in Wales, with **66% saying they never book with the same provider.**

The North East are most loyal (25% always book with the same providers)

The Welsh are most fickle (66% never book with same providers)

Q: When travelling abroad do you consistently book with the same provider?

Chart data:
- No, never: 52%
- Yes: 26%
- Yes always, please specify which providers: 19%
- N/A I've only booked a holiday abroad once: 4%

Source: Great State Travel Survey 2018

Satisfaction drives loyalty

Part of this lack of loyalty can be attributed to the fact that the customer service provided by a lot of brands is deemed merely 'good enough'.

Indeed, this year's UK Customer Service Index shows that, for organisations who score 9 or more out of 10 for customer satisfaction, **96% of their customers are loyal to them.** This stands in stark contrast to **66% loyalty for companies that score 8 to 8.9 out of 10.**

Moreover, brands who score 9 or more out of 10 for customer satisfaction also see disproportionate impact in terms of advocacy and trust.

It's clear that expectations are sky high when 8.9 out of 10 is now deeply average.

How to drive satisfaction and loyalty: provide 'end-to-end' services

In order to drive customer satisfaction and loyalty, many companies are attempting to meet the leisure traveller's every need - before, during and after a trip. By owning the customer in this way, they believe they can minimise their reasons to ever shop elsewhere.

There is an extremely strong correlation between the brands most trusted to deliver end-to-end experiences, and those who have achieved the most customer loyalty.

Our survey shows the most trusted brands to deliver end-to-end experiences in travel are **Thomas Cook, TUI, Booking.com and Expedia;** these are the exact same four brands that also came out as commanding the most loyalty amongst customers.

Commercially, being trusted with end-to-end delivery is highly valuable. In 2017, **TUI increased its underlying EBITA by 12.0 per cent, with turnover up 11.7 per cent.** It was the third consecutive year that the company delivered double-digit growth.

Q: The travel brands most trusted to deliver end-to-end experiences (short haul)

Brand	%
Thomas Cook	51%
Booking.com	40%
TUI	39%
Expedia	34%
Jet2 Holidays	34%
EasyJet	33%
Lastminute.com	24%
Secret Escapes	17%
KAYAK	14%
I wouldn't trust any brand	9%
Other, please specify	6%
Handpicked (Telegraph Travel)	5%
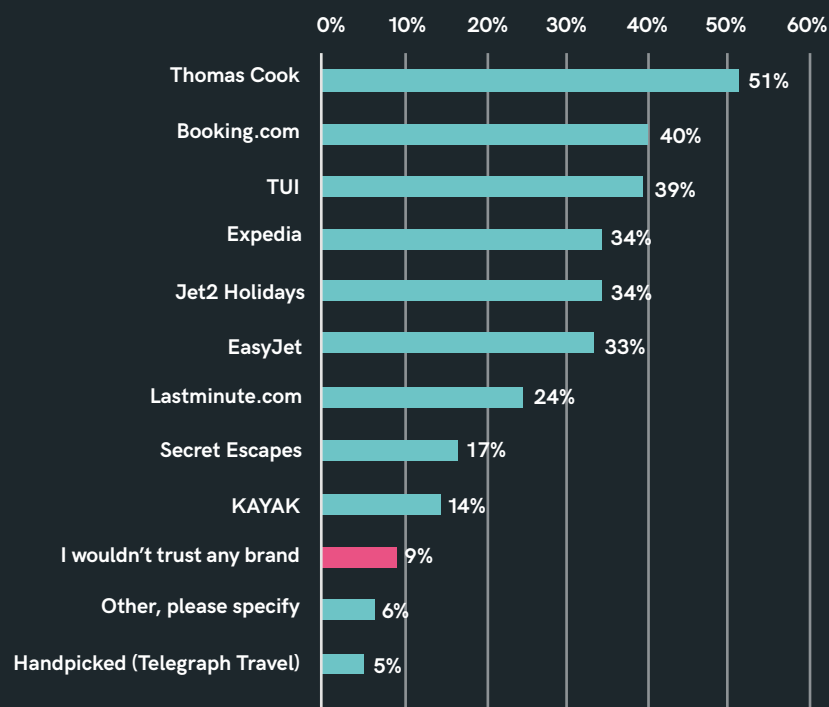
Q: The brands most popular amongst those who always book with the same provider

Brand
TUI
Thomas Cook
Expedia
Booking.com
Thomson
easyjet
Jet2
British Airways
Ryanair
Trivago
Skyscanner
First Choice
Virgin Atlantic
Airbnb
Travel Republic
Lastminute.com
KLM
Emirates
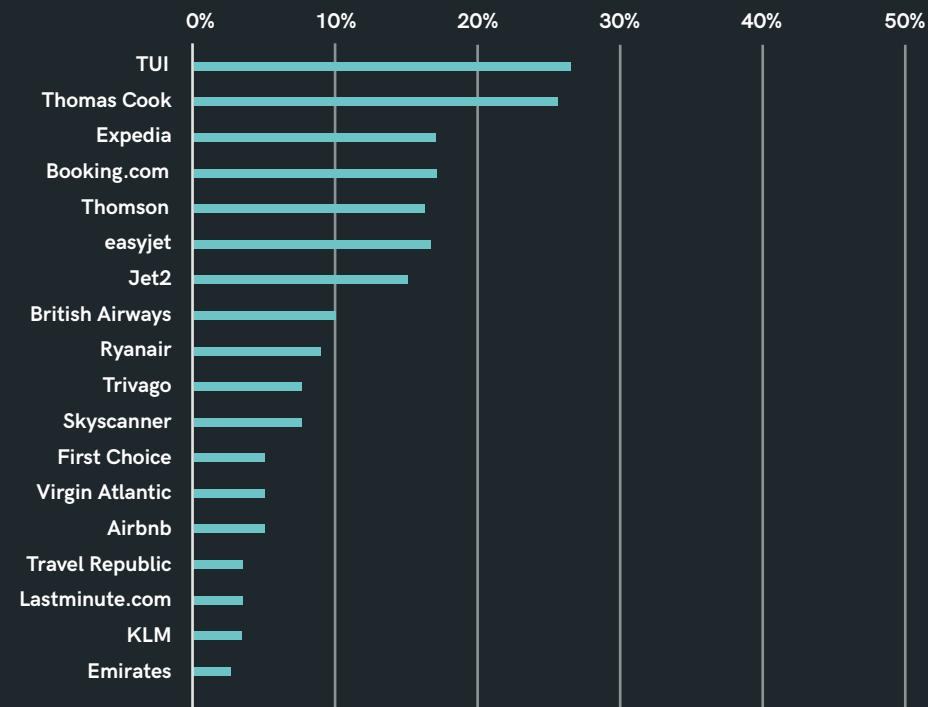
Source: Great State Travel Survey 2018

Where 'end-to-end' services should start: fundamental pain points

For brands planning or involved in the digital transformation of their business (45% are in the 'early stages' according to IDG), it's easy to favour developing exciting new technological innovations in the hope of inspiring delight, rather than tackling common but rather bland pain points.

The fact is, however, that British holidaymakers say the greatest impact a brand could have on improving their travel experience is not the creation of 'standout' new experiences in airports (like Deliveroo to the gate, or VR in departure lounges) but simply ensuring there are no hidden costs or extras (top of our list, cited by half our survey respondents). In short, when it comes to improving customer experience, reducing sources of frustration trumps creating new added value.
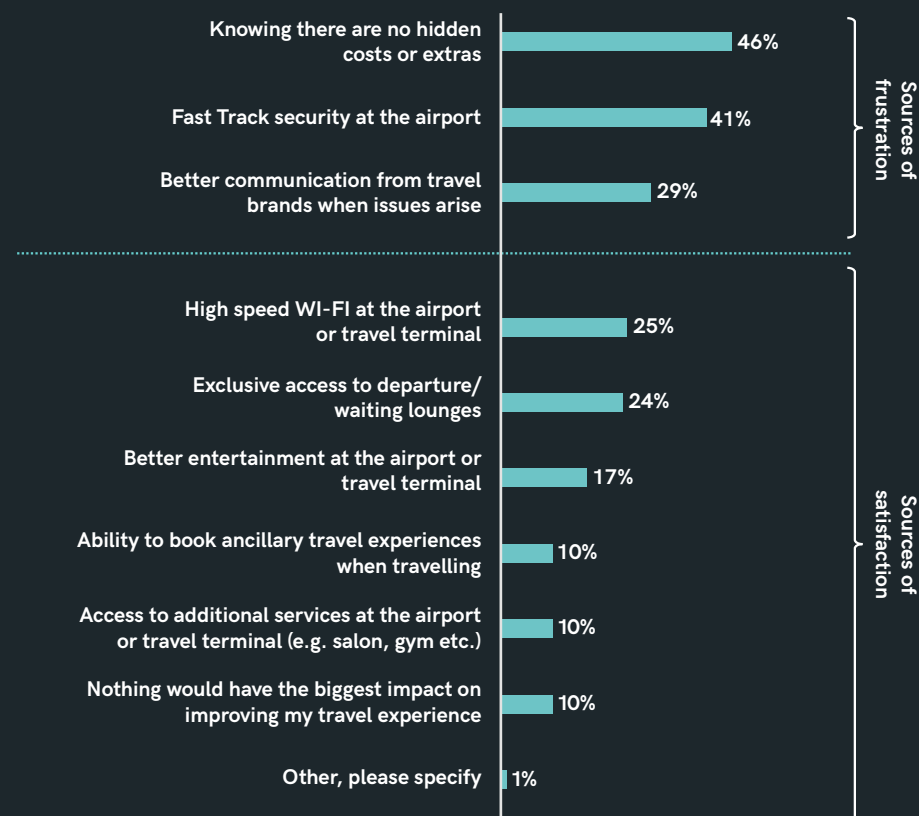
35%

Said their biggest frustration was **unexpected** or **hidden extra costs**

46%

Said knowing there are **no hidden costs** or **extras would improve their experience**

Q: What would have the biggest impact on improving your travel experience?

Sources of frustration

Knowing there are no hidden costs or extras	46%
Fast Track security at the airport	41%
Better communication from travel brands when issues arise	29%

Sources of satisfaction

High speed WI-FI at the airport or travel terminal	25%
Exclusive access to departure/ waiting lounges	24%
Better entertainment at the airport or travel terminal	17%
Ability to book ancillary travel experiences when travelling	10%
Access to additional services at the airport or travel terminal (e.g. salon, gym etc.)	10%
Nothing would have the biggest impact on improving my travel experience	10%
Other, please specify	1%

Source: Great State Travel Survey 2018

Anticipating Frustration

Our survey shows that the biggest frustrations amongst today's holidaymakers are delays and cancellations and queues and congestion (cited by 53% and 36% of respondents respectively). The most commonly expected digital feature of travel brands, meanwhile, is live information (cited by 53%).

Taken together, these findings suggest that customers want more timely information to help make more informed decisions about their journey, particularly when problems arise.
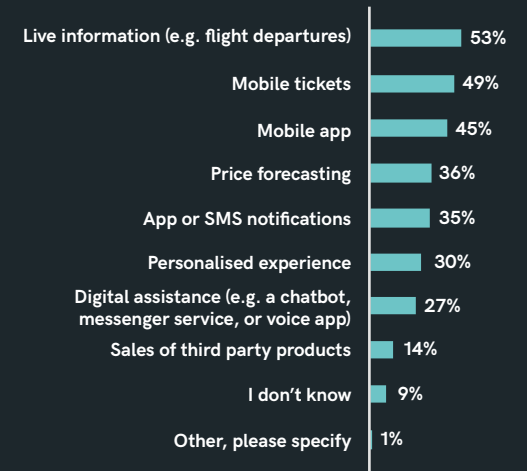
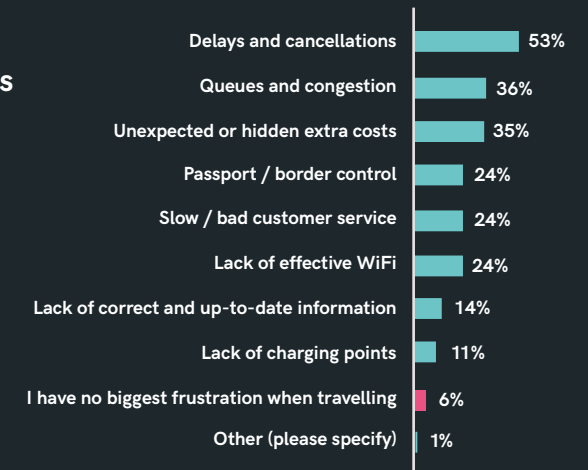**49%** of consumers expect brands to provide mobile tickets

45% of consumers expect brands to provide a mobile app

Q: What digital features do you expect travel brands to provide?

Live information (e.g. flight departures)	53%
Mobile tickets	49%
Mobile app	45%
Price forecasting	36%
App or SMS notifications	35%
Personalised experience	30%
Digital assistance (e.g. a chatbot, messenger service, or voice app)	27%
Sales of third party products	14%
I don't know	9%
Other, please specify	1%

Q: What are your biggest frustrations when travelling?

Delays and cancellations	53%
Queues and congestion	36%
Unexpected or hidden extra costs	35%
Passport / border control	24%
Slow / bad customer service	24%
Lack of effective WiFi	24%
Lack of correct and up-to-date information	14%
Lack of charging points	11%
I have no biggest frustration when travelling	6%
Other (please specify)	1%

Source: Great State Travel Survey 2018

Getting ahead of pain points with digital

When it comes to handling customer pain points, brands must use digital methods to anticipate and prevent them. Indeed, The UK Customer Service Index recently reported that complaint handling is costly and "does not necessarily foster loyalty." This is because almost a third of customers who experience problems never report them.

Currently, most attempts to assist customers are piecemeal. Information is often vague or unhelpful, with **over a quarter (26%) of people who are unhappy with digital travel services saying you can't get the right information.** As brands gain increasing access to live data, it's clear that they must start using it to the benefit of their customers.

Brand example: Trainline

Trainline uses natural language processing to scan Twitter for causes of delay, which they then communicate to passengers through their app, often faster than official announcements from operators.

It's exactly this sort of thinking – using digital technology in an intelligent way to keep customers accurately informed in real time – that has helped Trainline to become the leading rail and bus ticket provider in the UK, with 5 million installs of its app compared to National Rail's 1 million.

How to improve 'end-to-end' services:
replicate the human touch at scale

If they are to drive trust (and in turn retain customers), our survey reveals that today's digital-first brands need to deliver assistance that feels human and bespoke. This is a key issue holding travel players back with 22% of survey respondents having a negative perception of travel brands' digital offerings - agreeing that 'It's hard to talk to a real person'.

A sense of human assistance reassures customers that they will get the answer they need, especially when they're navigating confusing costs or website wording. Leisure travel companies should aim to replicate the levels of service associated with an expert agent but at mass scale - making accessible all the benefits of a personal touch to everyone, irrespective of budget. To deliver this, brands can lean on digital solutions, their own staff or the user community.

Brand examples:
KLM & airbnb

KLM recently launched BB (short for BlueBot), an AI-powered assistant that the brand is calling 'a member of the KLM service family.' BB's features include a self-learning chatbot that helps customers book a flight, and a voice-powered tool which uses live information about the customer's destination to guide them on what to pack. BB is supported by 250 human service colleagues - the world's largest social media team - for when further assistance is needed.

May 2018 saw Airbnb announce a feature enabling guests to post videos of their holiday online. Under the heading 'Travel Stories', users can upload short videos with captions and tag stories with Airbnb locations and experiences. This feature allows other customers to learn about these locations, or even book them via the app.

Final thoughts

It's an exhilarating time to be in travel. Rapid change is influencing all brands in the sector. Whilst this creates enormous opportunity, there's not enough room for everyone.

Our report concludes with five key take outs:

One

Customers are in the driving seat

Put them first, every time

Two

Connected, seamless experiences win

Ease frustration first, then find ways to add delight

Three

Technology enables change but people deliver it

Replicate the human touch at scale, deliver assistance that feels personal and bespoke

Four

Drive satisfaction and loyalty by providing end-to-end services

Give customers reasons not to shop around by connecting useful services

Five

Be upfront and transparent

Provide timely information about costs, deal with problems quickly if they arise

As our findings highlighted, today's holidaymakers are more demanding than ever. And given how many things still go wrong when people are travelling – such as delays, lost baggage and missed connections - that means it's all too easy to disappoint consumers and lose them to an ever-expanding set of rivals.

In this context, a brands' first priority must be to develop a first-class end-to-end customer experience, where common pain points are anticipated and potential disappointment is transformed into delight.

About Great State

We are a new breed of agency, created to help brands keep pace with today's connected consumer.

Consumers have higher expectations than ever before - driven by rapid changes in technology and fierce competition in every sector.

Meeting those expectations requires different thinking and capabilities than those offered by traditional agencies, consultancies and tech providers

We provide:

• Brand & Growth Strategy
• Digital Strategy & transformation
• Product innovation
• Experience design
• Technology & support

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> **"We need to shape our technical solutions around our customers' needs not vice versa."**
>
> Matt Lovell, Head of Data, Analytics and Insight, Eurostar

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