



Too many (marketing) cooks in the kitchen?

Avoid the confusion of conflicting marketing plans

End the madness >



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Five Minutes With: Stephen Taylor Breaks Down Marketing in the Travel Industry

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1) What kind of challenges or opportunities do travel marketers face that marketers in other industries don't necessarily encounter?

One thing that's different between travel and other industries is that the universe of resources for travel research and planning is nearly infinite. [There are] online platforms and booking sites for hotels, rental cars, and airfare, [as well as] traveler magazines, websites, blogs, Facebook and Instagram feeds, and consumer review pages. In his pursuit of the ideal timing, itinerary, and price point, the average traveler will search nearly 40 websites. Cutting through this meandering path to purchase to deliver effective ads can be a huge challenge for travel marketers.

The traveler's path to purchase is also different from the path to purchase of general consumers [in that] each airfare or hotel room booked revolves around a specific origin, destination, time, and impetus to travel. The travel planner is in-market for a certain time period with a specific idea of how he wants to travel. This specificity [results in] [data insights](#) for a fairly granular level of targeting, and provides more opportunities for marketers to successfully engage with travelers at different points in time within their customer journey.

[Another key differentiator?] In most cases, the product itself changes price and/or expires...You can only sell that particular hotel room on that particular night once!

2) Is there a standard customer journey travelers go through? How can marketers do a better job of identifying what stage customers are in, and how can they ensure that they send them the right message at the right time?



Stephen Taylor Sojern's SVP of enterprise solutions

Generally, travelers begin in what we call the "dream and discover" stage. [In this stage,] they begin to toy around with online research for an upcoming trip they have in mind. This is where marketers can start collecting data on basic travel intent, such as destination. For instance, our Sojern data shows that, in North America, Tuesdays and Wednesdays are the top days for such aspirational searches.

After planning and comparing comes the booking phase. Booking data is incredibly valuable when combined with advanced algorithms [because] it allows marketers to place appropriate ads in front of consumers before their next big booking. For example, if Jenna has just booked a flight to New Orleans for Mardi Gras weekend, marketers can offer hotel ads personalized to her travel dates and needs.

Once airfare and hotels are booked, further opportunity exists to capture travelers as they look to book rental cars and seek out vacation experiences (from dining reservations to specialized tours).

3) How has the travel industry changed for marketers over the past year, and where can they expect it to go next?

One fascinating and increasingly important issue in travel marketing is the tension between hotels and online travel agencies (OTAs). Nowadays, hotels compete for direct bookings with big name booking sites, and, recently, OTAs have been scaling back the amount of guest information they share with hotels. Hotels must now hone their marketing strategies to increase direct bookings and, thus, revenue.

Additionally, the relatively new presence of short-term home rentals and home sharing—like Airbnb, for example—creates a greater supply of accommodation inventory, and the decrease in demand has impacted some hotel markets more than others. This situation presents an additional challenge for hotel marketers trying to compete and maintain shares of revenue.

4) What are the most important metrics to track in the travel industry? Are there any metrics that are overly hyped?

The key measure for the travel industry is bookings—“heads in beds, tourists in seats”—and the yield, or average value of those bookings, versus the cost to acquire them. The challenge for the marketing professional is to develop tracking methodologies to track marketing actions back to this core metric. The only real reason to ever spend marketing dollars is to drive a sale that would not have happened unless that money had been spent. Everything else, such as click-through rate, is marketing jargon, and a poor proxy for the really important metric.

[Besides] all the core metrics, real travel intent is interesting to examine overall [because] destinations shift in popularity due to a number of economic factors.

-- Stephen Taylor is SVP of enterprise solutions for [Sojern](#). This interview has been edited for grammar, clarity, and to remove promotional material.

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