

How to win travelers in the age of assistance

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Today's consumers can get what they want, when they want. As a result, they're more curious, demanding, and impatient than ever before.

As this shift expands across purchasing behaviors, we're seeing changes take flight in the travel industry too. Enabled by technology, travelers have greater expectations for assistance. When they need information or have a question, they're looking for assistive experiences that are useful, personal, and frictionless.

According to a recent study we conducted with Phocuswright, nearly six in 10 (57%) U.S. travelers feel that brands should tailor their information based on personal preferences or past behaviors.¹ Similarly, connecting results to the quality of predictive travel marketing models is the only way to make them better over time—and to truly grow your customer lifetime value.

At Google, we set out to help partners understand travel expectations and deliver automated, connected, and personalized experiences at scale—and measure effectiveness.

We're also continuing to expand our partnerships to ensure we have the comprehensive information consumers have come to expect from Google. Plus, we're stitching together the many pieces of trip planning so it's easy for users to save, revisit, and share their plans. This allows

think with 

travelers to pick up where they left off, efficiently finish tasks, and progress to the next step intuitively. In short, we're making the travel search experience on Google the best it can be.

For marketers, there's a great opportunity to assist today's travelers with decision-making at every step of the journey. As you head into the new year, here are three 2018 travel trends that emerged from the Google/Phocuswright study to keep in mind.

Travelers want to feel confident

Fifty-five percent of travelers we surveyed agree that they have to check too many sources of travel information before making a decision. And those decisions, once a traveler makes them, are stressful. Travelers are most concerned about finding the best price for their vacations—more so than with any other discretionary purchase that we asked about (such as electronics, home improvement, finances).

Comprehensive tools help them choose. After price, which is consistently the most important factor year-over-year, the ability to compare all options in one place was the most important element for travelers when shopping for the best deal.

The place to make a difference with them is on mobile. The travel industry is not keeping up with travelers' expectations. For instance, [eMarketer predicted that in 2017, mobile bookings would surpass 40% of digital travel sales](#). In 2017, a third of those surveyed still said they were uncomfortable researching and booking travel on their phone—nearly unchanged from 2015.²

Travelers want immediate gratification

In this new world of spontaneity, loyalty among travelers is no longer guaranteed. Only 9% of U.S. travelers “always” know which brand they want to book with prior to researching,³ and even elite loyalty program members are up for grabs if the price is right. Over two-thirds of U.S. elite hotel loyalty program members would pick a different hotel for a better price,⁴ and two-thirds of elite U.S. air loyalty program members would pick a different airline for a better price/schedule/route.⁵



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Source: Google/Phocuswright Travel Study 2017, Base: Leisure Travelers: U.S. n=673, Brazil n=640, U.K. n=635, France n=480, Germany n=553, Australia n=617, India, n=707, Japan n=462, S. Korea n=688.

Does this mean that the value of service and loyalty is diminished? Far from it, but this highlights the importance of differentiating one’s brand at every opportunity, whether it’s being there when someone searches for “top things to do in Greece,” having a fast mobile site that gives travelers the information they need on the fly, or proactively suggesting things to do in-destination once they’re on their way.

In this world of instant gratification, we also found that impulse travel shopping is increasing. Over 60% of U.S. travelers would consider an impulse trip based on a good hotel or flight deal.⁶ For some travelers, last-minute, short stints of travel throughout the year may be more fulfilling than one big trip a year. Globally, over the next 12 months, travelers plan on taking more short getaways (3 nights or less) than longer vacations (more than 3 nights) in the next 12 months.⁷



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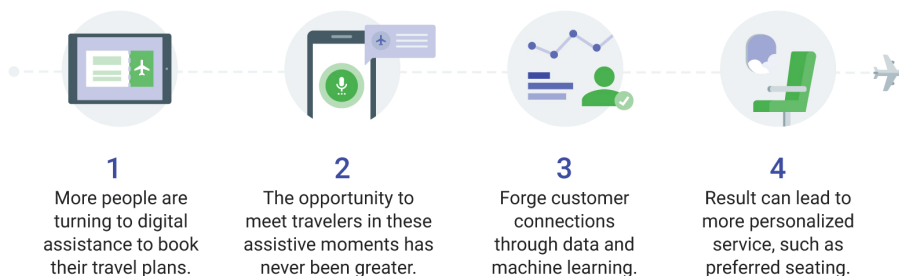
Source: Google/Phocuswright Travel Study 2017, Base: Leisure Travelers: U.S. n=857.

Increased access to information and the on-demand world that we live in today—accelerated by mobile—allows us to be more spontaneous. This could signal an opportunity for marketers to drive demand throughout the year.

Travelers crave personalization

Ever had a hotel know whether you prefer a room closer to the elevator before you check in? Or had an airline or cruise line employee proactively greet you with your drink of choice? Every day, these opportunities to wow travelers exist. These moments can not only leave a lasting impression, but they may also have a positive impact on long-term business outcomes. If a travel brand tailored its information and overall trip experience based on personal preferences or past behavior, 76% of U.S. travelers would be likely or extremely likely to sign up for the brand's loyalty program, and 36% (over 1 in 3) would pay more for more tailored information and experiences.⁸

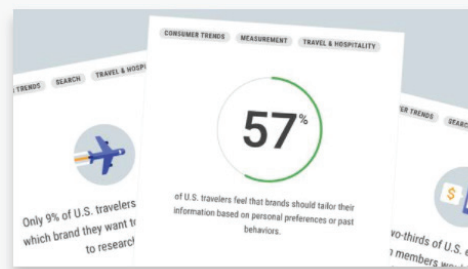
Meeting today's travelers on their purchase journeys



Here's the good news: Brands can seize opportunities to personalize consumer experiences, even before they embark on a trip. With more travelers turning to digital for assistance, marketers can connect with customers when they first express intent through online inspiration or research. Travel companies can segment their audiences, combine first- and third-party data, and use machine learning to connect with customers.

As traveler behavior continues to evolve, expectations will continue to rise. Navigating these changes can be challenging, but digital provides more opportunities than ever for marketers to meet traveler intent and expectations at every turn. And that's a trip worth taking.

Get all the data from this article.



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Sources

- 1-3,6,8** Google/Phocuswright Travel Study 2017, Base: Leisure Travelers: US: n=857.
- 4** Google/Phocuswright Travel Study 2017, Base: Leisure Travelers who participate in a hotel loyalty program: U.S. n=528.
- 5** Google/Phocuswright Travel Study 2017, Base: Leisure Travelers who participate in an airline frequent flier program: U.S.: n=571.