

Online Travel Companies Need To Invest In Consumer Engagement

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With the European online travel market predicted to be worth £91bn by 2012[i], consumers are putting higher expectations on their online travel experiences and expect a high degree of service and selection.

However, the latest eTravel Benchmark Study from eDigitalResearch reveals that many online travel companies are falling short of these expectations

Customer service was the lowest performing category in the study, which used online mystery shoppers to evaluate the end-to-end customer experience of 45 leading travel websites.

Low cost airlines were among the poorest performers, displaying basic booking sites supported by minimal human contact, while cruise operators and cross-channel ferries scored highly for customer service with customer queries dealt with quickly and effectively.

Lloyd Viney, associate director of eDigitalResearch comments:

“With holidays being the single biggest annual purchase for many people, having confidence in a company’s ability to help them through the booking process is critical in instilling trust and confidence. With online competition becoming more intense, those that will succeed will differentiate their service not necessarily on price, but on value, by providing quality customer support. Results of our study indicate that online travel organisations need to better engage with their customers in order to improve and match the performance of other sectors like the retail sector.”

The highest rating was 80.1% (weighted average across all key customer journey measures) for Premier Inn, a new entrant into the Benchmark study with the inclusion of hotels.

Premier Inn scored highly for first impressions, its easy and precise search function and overall booking process, but was weaker at initial research and telephone contact, with customers preferring more information and a quicker human response.

Despite it being the best overall travel performer, its rating was still 7% below that of the highest scoring online retail brand, M&S.

Online travel agents provided best practice in website performance, combining functionality with engaging content and using customer reviews to provide additional confidence in holiday selection.

Virgin Holidays came second overall due to a good balance between informative content and inspirational imagery, backed up by a good customer star rating system.

The biggest climbers from the last Benchmark study in November were Monarch and Eurotunnel, which both climbed 18 places.

Monarch has made major improvements to its customer service with its telephone and email services rated 25% higher than the previous study.

Eurotunnel has invested more in the front-end with large improvements noted for first impressions and initial research.

Despite the overall improvements in website functionality, the online travel sector still has some way to go to catch the retail sector, which is the best cross-sector performer. Â

While customer service is a key element that will help to close the gap, travel companies also need to better engage their customers.

Lloyd Viney explains:

“Customer expectations are increasing all the time and given the increasing choice available online, consumers are now guiding and influencing the purchasing behaviour of others. The leading retailers are capturing and using consumer opinion to their advantage via online communities and product reviews. This is where online travel brands can gain ground, as this will dictate where further investment is needed.”

If you would like to see the full presentation then please visit:
<http://ecustomeropinions.com/survey/survey.php?sid=185707194>

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