Why Chatbots Are Transforming the Travel Industry





With chatbots, customers can manage their own bookings without needing to wait on the line for the next available representative. By Bronwyn White, co-founder, MyTravelResearch.com

Chatbots can be simply defined as artificial intelligence programs that conduct conversations with humans through chat interfaces.

Consider a chatbot as a personal assistant who can respond to enquiries or give recommendations on a certain topic in a real-time manner.

Research shows that more consumers are using messaging apps compared to social networks, and this trend is fast extending to the travel industry where we are seeing chatbots as messenger apps being rolled out as a new and immediate interface of customer interaction.

According to a report from BI Intelligence in 2016, for the first time ever, messaging apps have now caught up with social networks in terms of users. In fact, messaging apps are now even more popular than social networks.

The combined global monthly active users of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn are between three and 3.5 billion, which lags compared to the combined active users of messenger apps including WhatsApp, Messenger, WeChat, and Viber at around 3.7 billion.

How Chatbots will Change the Travel Industry
• Chatbots are ideal for customer centric businesses and destinations. They can serve as 24/7 front-end customer care specialists. Gone are the days of responding manually to comments and enquiries in your blog, website, and social media channel.
• Chatbots are capable of totally transforming visitor servicing in destinations after hours. Frequently asked questions and enquiries can be answered any time of the day or night, including when travellers are arriving at a destination and the visitor information centre / welcome centre is closed.
• Responses can be automated using intelligent chatbots that can efficiently carry out basic requests for information. Chatbots meet the “instant” in instant messaging.
• Customers can be served quickly as time spent on hold waiting for enquiries to be answered is reduced / removed.
• Chatbots drastically reduce overheads (particularly for contact centres).
• Chatbots promote relationship management. As counter-intuitive as it sounds, bots are great at managing relationships with human beings. With thoughtful pre-programming, chatbots can supplement the entire travel experience, beginning with automated pre-arrival reminders, to suggesting nearby entertainment spots and transportation facilities at destination.
• Humans are open to using chatbots. In a recent study by Retale, when asked whether or not they had ever used a chatbot, almost 60% of respondents answered “yes”. And of those who hadn’t tried a chatbot, 53% said they were interested.
• It is market research as you go. From a research perspective, imagine the rich qualitative data you will collect concerning your customers. You can refine, change and develop travel products as you see trends emerging.

• Chatbots are multilingual. Imagine the diverse markets you can reach!
• Post-trip, bots may send out feedback forms that can solicit valuable information on how your business could further improve a guest's travel experience.

Expedia leading the way
Expedia is leading the rest of the field in terms of deploying chatbots to engage customers on their websites and social media. Chatting with Expedia in Messenger allows the traveller to book a hotel within the app, only being redirected to the Expedia website to input payment details.

Some 4 to 5 years ago, this simple process was one of the main reasons why hotlines were always busy. Now, with chatbots, customers can easily manage their own bookings without needing to wait on the line for the next available representative.

Kayak is one of the best-loved bots in the travelling scene. All the information you will ever need about flights, rental cars, hotels, and activities are fully integrated into its program. But it doesn't stop there. Kayak goes beyond by giving travellers the option to view a list of places they could go on a specific budget, and keeps travellers updated on future travel plans through Messenger. This practically draws the traveller back to the marketing funnel, creating a loop in the customer life cycle, which translates to maximised returns.

By using intelligent chatbots to respond to traveller enquiries, your business can concentrate on other areas of opportunity such as mapping out plans to increase repeat business and gaining loyalty for future travels.

Learn More
Learn more about how bots can help your travel business. My full blog on chatbots is available at https://www.mytravelresearch.com/chatbots-and-the-travel-industry/

MyTravelResearch.com will be covering this topic in the upcoming Tourism Marketing Rockstar Convention, 14 September 2017. The annual conference will be held in the world-famous Bondi Icebergs, Bondi Beach. Click https://mytravelresearch.lpages.co/rockstar2017/?ct=t%28Tourism+Marketing+Rock+Star+Convention%29&mc_cid=90a4216c17&mc_eid=%5BUNIQID%5D to register.

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About MyTravelResearch.com
MyTravelResearch.com is a market research and marketing firm specializing in the travel, tourism and aviation industries. Its specialty is providing insights that are actionable.

Founded by principals with lifetime careers in travel, tourism and aviation, MyTravelResearch.com exists to build the visitor economy and successful tourism businesses. It does this by putting the voice of the customer and best practice business thinking into an easy to implement, hands-on approach via an innovative membership model. MyTravelResearch.com can help:
* National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) meet the expectations of their industry by acting as an extension of their research and marketing resources?
* Businesses make more informed decisions. (It is like having your own research and/or marketing team)

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