



## The Googlization of Business: Travel

### **The impact of Google -- and search as a category -- on the travel industry.**

Sometimes it's hard to imagine what we did before September 1998. That's the year two college students from Stanford opened the doors of the company that's now known as Google, Inc.

Seven years and billions of queries later, Google, along with other search engines, has become a daily destination for anyone in need of fast, accurate answers for every question under the sun.

But Google's impact is not limited to the individual user. America's number-one search engine has also fundamentally changed the way companies do business. Its ability to bring together sellers and interested buyers at a pivotal point in the purchase process has made it mission-critical to a number of industries.

### **Search takes to the road**

One such industry is travel, where the U.S. online market is expected to grow to \$91 billion in 2009, or 33 percent of travel purchased, according to Jupiter Research.

This article, the third and final installment in a series titled "The Googlization of Business," takes a look at Google's impact on this industry, analyzing how the search engine has shifted ownership of the travel experience and evened the playing field for travel providers. By doing so, Google has fundamentally changed the way travel is thought about and marketed.

### **Everyone's a free agent**

If today's traveler authored a self-help book, it might be titled, "Co-Dependent No More." Unlike the old paradigm of travel, in which consumers relied on agents to supply them with travel information and secure reservations, the modern traveler can do it all with the simple click of a mouse.

The internet has given rise to a wealth of tools that enable travelers to take control of the travel experience, whether it's altering an itinerary, looking for a lower price at the last minute or getting the weather forecast in a destination city. Google's robust search capabilities have made those tools readily available, resulting in a more empowered consumer.

### **We love to fly... but so does everyone else**

This reduced friction between the traveler and the information he or she seeks has resulted in a market where established airlines, hotels and car rental companies can no longer rely on the marketing clout of their name alone. The increased exposure Google has given to small and medium-sized travel vendors, whether by sponsored links or organic listings, has enabled these companies to successfully enter the

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market. In short, people no longer fly Airline XYZ because they "always fly Airline XYZ" -- the incentive is there to try something different.

This first wave of search-based innovation saw agents being pushed aside by online aggregators who charged travel providers for inclusion in their engines. Now the technology has evolved such that specialty sites like Kayak and search engines like Google are able to crawl their sites regardless of insider/outsider status. Engines that limit their results to those willing to pay run the risk of becoming obsolete. Ultimately the consumer is the one to benefit from the increased number of options.

### **How can we help you? No, really**

Google has given travelers the power to act as their own travel agents and shown businesses the need to go beyond brand identity alone to reach consumers. It therefore makes sense that the two have led to fundamental changes in the way travel is marketed.

A random search on Google for a travel-related keyword or phrase (Dallas, Aruba hotels, et cetera) will reveal a wealth of information in the sponsored links. First you'll see that the messaging is all about consumer empowerment -- travel tools such as calculators, planners, maps and guides abound. Many say this style of marketing has fueled the additional volume that's allowed the industry to stay afloat in an uncertain economic climate.

Another trend is toward experience-based marketing. Rather than using their site as solely a booking device, travel providers are building them out with ancillary content containing everything having to do with the destination -- whether it's photo galleries, video travelogues or user-generated content such as travel blogs and reviews.

Finally, we see travel being marketed in a much more refined way. The targeted nature of search engine marketing has allowed ads to cater to specific groups of travelers. Keywords and messaging can be adjusted to speak to audiences according to intent (leisure vs. business), demographic (twenty-somethings vs. senior citizens) and geographic location (a weekend jaunt vs. a trip abroad). Marketers know what kind of trips people are taking and can push out promotions accordingly -- without wasting money on haphazard campaigns.

### **It's a small world after all**

When Google first appeared on the scene, many worried that the search engine would spell the beginning of the end for travel intermediaries. Such fears have yet to be realized. Instead, it would be more accurate to say that rather than replacing travel agencies and resellers, Google has simply rearranged the marketplace to bring them a little closer together. This "Googlization" has benefited both travelers (more power, more possibilities) and those businesses in the space (more accountability, more sustainability). It's happy trails ahead for all involved.

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**About Hotel Traffic Builders (HTB):**

We are a full-service digital marketing agency dedicated to the boutique hotel & residential resort industry.

Our mission is very simple: ***"To maximize sales success by providing our clients with exceptional internet marketing results"***.

Our clients consistently enjoy industry leading success because of our dedicated focus and experience. Our use of state-of-the art tools, best in class technology and wealth of industry experience enable us to provide full solution applications. We recognize that our clients are experts at running their hotels, and our role is to develop and maintain online marketing leadership for our client hotels.

We differentiate ourselves through:

**Industry Expertise**

We have a singular specialized focus on boutique hotel, resort and vacation home e-Marketing. Our sole goal is to be the best at what we do by ensuring maximum success for all of your e-marketing activities. Our 52 person design and development technology team delivers unparalleled quality and results. Our sole focus is resort marketing.

**Individual Customized Creative Approach & Solutions**

Every client has unique needs, opportunities and priorities, our e-Marketing plans are always custom built and based on in-depth research of your specific hotel.

**Cutting Edge Technology**

We use proprietary state of the art tools and applications that enable project efficiency, measurability and success of your e-marketing. We not only promise success, we document it in a 24/7 real-time secured private reporting platform that we create for every hotel client. Our clients never wonder about how hard their marketing dollars are working because they always know!

**Return On Investment**

The true measurement of our success is our proven ability to deliver reservation bookings. We grow booking results year over year, and we grow advance bookings, which result in higher occupancy levels and ADRs.

**Contact us at: [www.HotelTrafficBuilders.com](http://www.HotelTrafficBuilders.com) or call us 954- 421-6399**

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