

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Travelers most receptive to ads when beginning to research: report

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Michael Kors fall/winter 2014 ad campaign

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It is much easier to influence the booking of a frequent traveler than coax a trip out of an infrequent one, according to a report from Expedia.

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“[The British Traveler’s Path to Purchase](#)” examines the devices and resources used by British travelers and found that frequent travelers are five times more likely to notice travel advertising. Better understanding the purchase journey for consumers can help marketers position themselves to increase market share.

On the purchase journey

Three out of four UK residents consume travel content digitally, and the January and February numbers in 2016 were up 82 percent year over year, spurred largely by more mobile browsing.

The purchase journey generally included three different resources and 18.2 visits to travel sites per week in the 45 days prior to booking. The growing millennial population – a quarter of whom travel with friends – average even higher rates.

The most common resource used when consumers begin searching for travel options is

friends/family recommendations, underscoring the importance of hotels providing memorable experiences that consumers will recommend and share on social media. Search engines tie with friends and family, meaning that the simplest step is still among the most important for marketers.



Image courtesy of Four Seasons

As the purchase journey continues, however, online travel agencies (OTAs), airlines and hotels begin to become more prominent. Among British consumers, OTAs such as Expedia were the most influential online resource for booking decisions, whereas hotel sites ranked fifth and travel information sites ranked sixth.

To continue to attract consumers, hotels should consider partnerships with OTAs and otherwise ensure proper visibility given the sway such sites hold over consumers.

Engagement with travel content also increases as the journey approaches, with OTAs being the sole resource that grows week-to-week. OTAs comprise 32 percent of visits to travel content in the 45 days prior to booking, with travel research at 21 percent and accommodations at just 16 percent, further emphasizing the importance of OTA placement and partnerships.

Fifty-four percent of travel bookers began their research considering more than one destination, and of that group, 30 percent – meaning around 15 percent of travelers overall – say advertising influenced their decision. Accordingly, ad exposure decreases as the trip approaches.

Millennials are at least 25 percent more likely to say that they noticed ads than baby boomers or Gen Xers, meaning that the market is particularly ripe for advertising. The increasing preference for travel over material goods further suggests that the group is a prime growth market for hoteliers and others in the travel business.



Affluent family

This advertising should be done earlier in the journey, as recall of hotel ads is at 52 percent when bookers first begin research, dropping to 39 percent when they start to narrow options. This suggests that hotels are themselves motivators for some travelers, but may not be as able to sway consumers as they begin to zero in on a specific destination.

The early bird

The receptiveness to ads early in the purchase journey, along with the increase in visits to travel sites and corresponding increase in advertising impressions as the journey goes on suggests that marketers should focus efforts early in the journey. This means continued investment in search engine marketing as well as online travel agencies, which hold a bigger traffic lead over hotel sites earlier in the travel journey.

L2 recently found that affiliate sites and online travel agencies have kicked brands out of first-page search results.

Across 452 non-branded keywords, TripAdvisor had the highest first-page display rate by a significant portion, and similar sites and online travel agencies (OTAs) dominated the top 10. To make themselves visible to prospective travelers researching online, brands must make themselves visible on these sites and target consumers by region ([see story](#)).

Marketers can further tailor their advertising approach based on what device consumers tend to favor at different parts of the travel journey.

Tablet use in all stages of travel has increased among travelers in the United Kingdom, according to a report from Expedia.

Smartphone and tablet ownership rates in the UK, at 79 percent and 43 percent respectively, are higher than those of the United States and continental Europe. While it is widely known that mobile and multi-platform use is growing, understanding these trends on a regional level could help brands fine-tune their marketing mix at a regional level ([see story](#)).

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