

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Luxury travel brands need to look to chatbots: report

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De Grisgono chatbot gave travel recommendations in the Swiss Alps. Image credit: de Grisgono

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

Chatbots for travel brands will soon likely go beyond something that is simply unique and interesting, but will be a necessity that consumers will come to expect.

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According to "[Are bots worth the bother?](#)", a new report from EyeforTravel, the cost of creating chatbots is lowering, which means it will be more accessible for brands and become more of a standard. Travel is a sector that could be significantly impacted by chatbots in a positive manner, as they can make booking and other tasks much simpler.

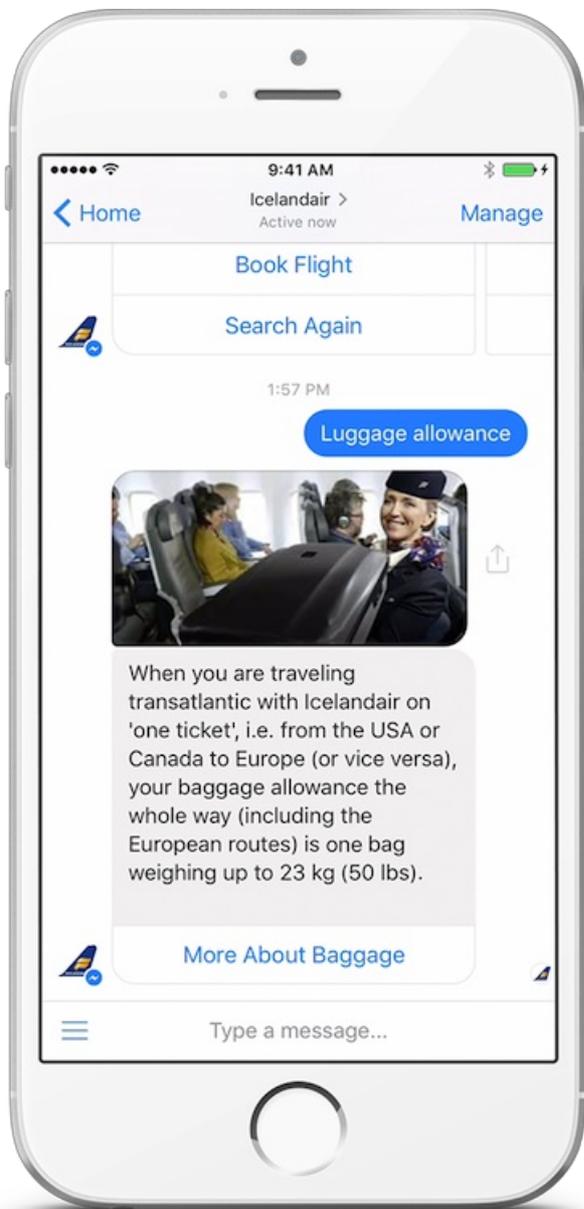
"The key takeaway for me is that brands across the travel industry are spending huge amounts of money to gain visibility and promote themselves on channels but they are potentially missing out the biggest channels around in the form of social media giants," said Alex Hadwick, head of research at [EyeforTravel](#), London. "There's no way you can effectively manage the social media aspect with humans alone, even at this stage, as Facebook and WeChat have billions of monthly average users.

"Therefore, chatbots are going to become not just a 'cool tool to have' but a necessity as younger consumers who expect social media responses become more important and mobile increases its importance in the purchase funnel for travel products," he said. "To handle the number of enquiries and reach out to consumers directly, then chatbots are a key enabler."

Chatbot significance

While marketers are putting significant amount of stock into social channels, many are missing out on the potential of chatbots. For consumers, the experience is much easier than traditional customer service or booking methods.

The chatbot experience prevents them from having to completely stop what consumers are doing to ask a question or complete a task. It is a habit that is already rooted in mass consumer behavior, making it easy for first time users.



Icelandair's messenger chatbot. Image credit: Icelandair

Brands' bots themselves will make the experience faster, removing the need to wait for a representative.

EyeforTravel reveals that when adopting a chatbot strategy it is vital to tap into consumer data for a quality experience. Without this data, the chatbot experience will likely steer off course.

The report also detailed that investment in creating chatbots is becoming more accessible.

Consumers are flocking to social media to have customer service queries answered, and brands and Twitter are responding by making the process more seamless.

Twitter has released a bot builder in which brands such as idea sharing platform Evernote and the United Kingdom's Monarch Airlines are using to answer customer questions. Through direct messaging on Twitter, these bots will help answer these issues and direct the query to the correct department ([see more](#)).

Chatbot examples

Icelandair is an example of how travel brands can leverage chatbots to better the customer experience. Before launching the message bot, the airline combed through social media inquiries to determine which queries were asked by customers the most.

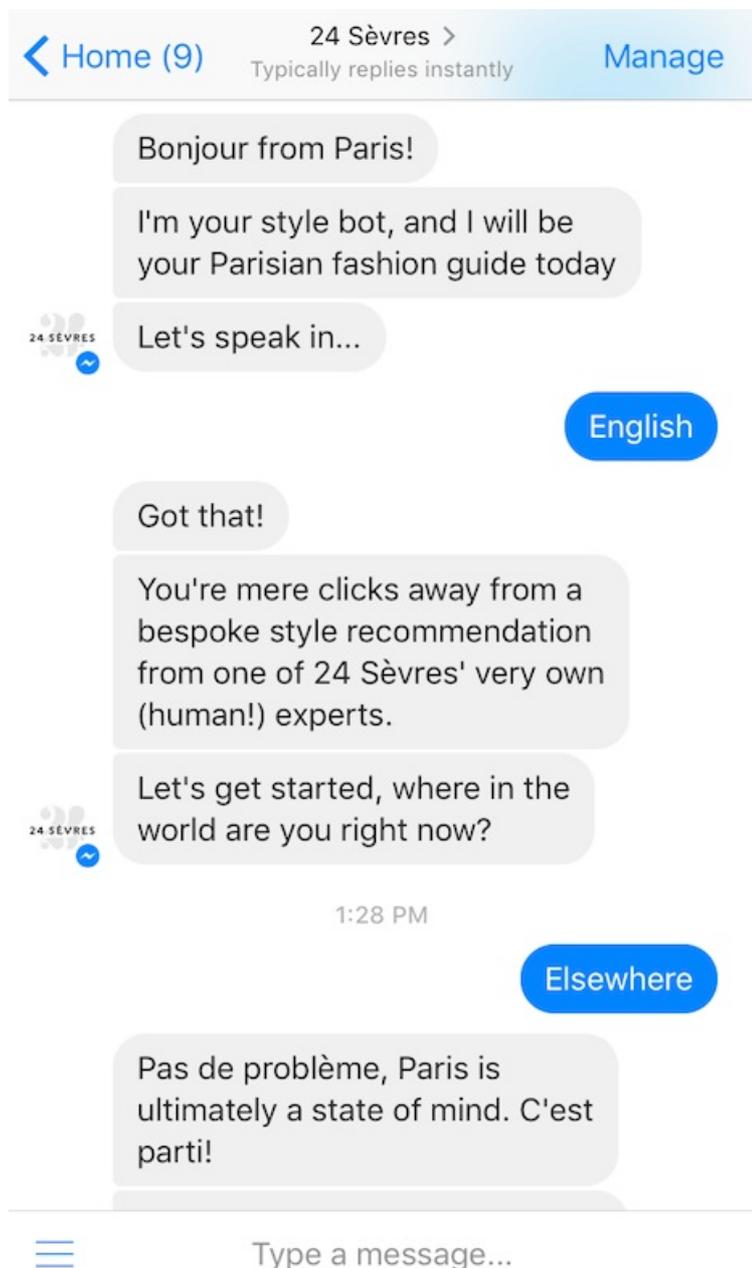
This strategy allows the chatbot to be most effective by addressing the most common issues.

Edwardian Hotels launched a series of apps in which the staff documented notes on guests, service rooms, breakfast tables and managed work schedules.

Also, Swiss jeweler de Grisogono put together an interactive guide to St. Moritz for the ultimate alpine get-together

experience. Seeking to bring its Black Book for St. Moritz to life, de Grisogono designed a chatbot for recommendations in real time.

Interacting with the de Grisogono BOTler ensured travelers an unforgettable trip via reservations at the best restaurants in St. Moritz and insider advice on unique or hidden venues. The chatbot was also able to make an appointment at de Grisogono's St. Moritz boutique ([see more](#)).



A chatbot experience from LVMH's ecommerce site 24Sevres. Image credit: 24 Sevres

"It's hard to say what surprised me most having been involved in the project throughout," EyeforTravel's Mr. Hadwick said. "I would say that the pace of growth in time spent in social media and messaging apps and the cost of implementation struck me as being quite striking.

"A near 400 percent growth in time spent on these apps in 2016 is dramatic and the fact it is so high above other categories demonstrates a shift," he said. "It is not even like have to imagine what a social media hub for other services looks like, as WeChat already exists and it seems that Western digital behaviors are heading in a similar direction."