

**Consumer travel search with voice-assisted technology:
Eliminating choice or fast-track to your dream destination?**

Insights from the 2017 Accenture Digital Consumer Survey recently revealed that all age groups surveyed (ranging from 14yrs old up to 55yrs +) were either using, or interested in using, voice-enabled digital assistants at a proportion of at least 50%.¹ Early adopters are using voice-enabled technology daily – though arguably the greatest proliferation has been in assisting with routine tasks, when used in the home, private spaces or embedded into smart phones to facilitate specific requests, binary commands or operate in a specific environment.

Now, with Alexa boasting over 15,000 skills in its armoury and a powerful alliance with Kayak, (in collaboration with Booking.com and Priceline), Amazon is taking stronger strides into the travel discovery sphere and the consolidating the booking process.² Similar travel-discovery and booking conversion capabilities are available with Google Home (using its Conversation Actions linked to the ITA software, QPX, for the booking process) and further developments could be on the horizon for Bixby for Samsung, Siri for Apple and Cortana (Microsoft).

With that in mind, will we start to see a reduction in choices presented, consideration points and time spent trip planning as we lean towards voice-assisted tech and AI to inspire our travels? Will our voice-enabled devices know our preferences, desires and behaviours so well that we'll be encouraged to visit the places we've been wanderlusting for – without realising said places were on our bucket list?

Or, with a typical travel browsing period topping over 100 sites in half as many days,³ does voice simply add another layer to omni-channel interactions, where travel-seekers may use voice tech to cross-check against content or marketing they've already been exposed to. Consumers may be likely to turn to their digital assistant to check "When is Bali's rainy season?" or to "List hotels with spas in Ubud" whilst simultaneously browsing the laptops, tablets or mobiles – or talking to Skyscanner's Facebook messenger chatbot for flight price comparison.

The problem that may then arise is limitation of or bias in returned results, based on issues such as inaccuracy of assumptions, mis-learned behaviour or infancy of supported apps/skills which limit the returned results. What if we're delivered results just from airline, hotel or OTA partners with the qualified tech capabilities? Does this shut out the small independents, without the huge innovation budgets, even more? Are these issues any different to the same challenges we face in the marketing

¹ Accenture 2017 Digital Consumer Survey. Figure based on 25,996 respondents worldwide, https://www.accenture.com/us-en/_acnmedia/PDF-39/Accenture-PoV-Dynamic-Consumers.pdf

² Kayak + Alexa want you to get a room, Sept 2017, <https://www.kayak.com/news/kayak-alexa-want-get-room/>

³ comScore, UK Desktop Panels, Custom Path to Booking Visitation Analysis, Share of Total Visits, Online Travel Booker Segment: Dec '15 – Feb '16

landscape pre-voice technologies? It seems very similar to navigating advertising transparency, price parity, audience profiling, share of search online and so forth.

Addressing the subject of search, choice and the prospect of monetising voice-based search results, Thom Arkestal, Head of Insights, EMEA, Microsoft Advertising, states “If you already are using your voice, then the digital assistant will already be learning what your preferred brand is.”⁴

Perhaps it’s only a matter of time before Alexa’s worked out your dream holiday, booked it – and requested the time off work on your behalf.

⁴ <http://www.thedrum.com/news/2017/10/16/the-future-search-can-image-and-voice-search-cater-paid-results>