These Travel Brands Are Doing Personalization Right

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In Skift's recent survey of businesses in the digital travel and hospitality industry, 53% of respondents listed providing a high-quality customer experience as a top priority for the next six months. At the same time, 22% listed deepening existing customer relationships as a priority and 17% reported increasing customer retention.

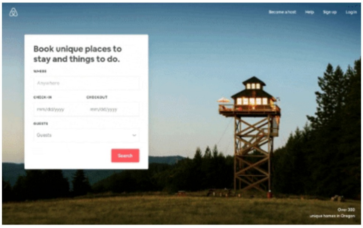
Creating personalized experiences through the research and booking phases of travel planning—not to mention during the travel experience itself—is one way to address all three of these priorities simultaneously. In other words, based on Skift's data, the priorities of 92% of digital travel industry businesses could be addressed through an expanded personalization program.

However, launching and maintaining a personalization program can be difficult. The same survey found widespread uncertainty about the ability to effectively deliver personalized experiences, with 72% of respondents reporting they were "somewhat confident," "somewhat concerned," or "quite concerned." Indeed, for some time, personalization has been a topic many people have talked about, but few have implemented effectively.

So, what does an effective personalization program in the travel industry look like? We've done our research and found seven travel businesses that are using personalization in compelling ways throughout their digital customer journey.

AirBnB's Localized Promotions

Often, when people talk about personalization, the implication is that customer experiences will be completely unique and precisely tailored. While such one-to-one personalization may be an admirable goal, it's not the only form of personalization available. In fact, far simpler forms of personalization can be very effective.



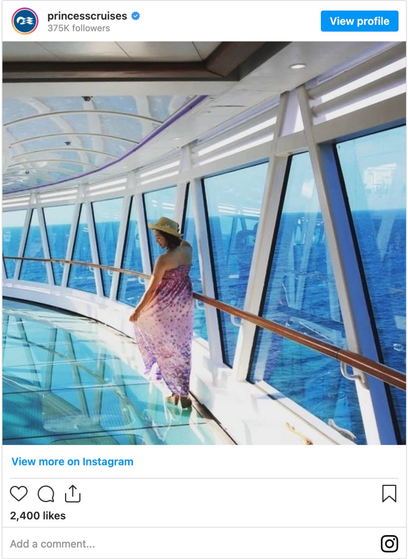
The Airbnb homepage detects a visitor's location and tailors the homepage promotion based on that. Visitors from Singapore, for example, see a promotion for travel in Thailand, while visitors from California, see a promotion for rentals in Oregon.

Airbnb, for example, uses readily-available location data for its visitors to tailor its homepage. While this implementation is simple, the change is dramatic due to the real estate allocated to the promotion. This is important because relevance has been demonstrated to be a strong signal of quality, which has been found to foster trust and motivate positive behavior among online consumers.

Segmentation & CRM at Princess Cruises

Simply knowing how to segment customers for the purposes of tailoring and targeting communications or experiences is one of the most significant challenges in implementing personalization.

Many businesses have a wealth of customer information housed in various databases across the organization. Websites, social media, and email campaigns also generate near-limitless visitor data. But how can this information be combined and, more importantly, utilized to drive business performance?



Recommended Read: Personalization & Customer Data: Why Context is Critical To Optimize Your Customer Experience

As one of the largest cruise providers in the world, Princess Cruises had a wealth of historical customer data in addition to a constant stream of website visitor data.

However, the various information captured by different brands, websites, and other systems was heavily siloed and difficult to use. To address this issue, the company implemented a central customer information database, or digital management platform, that allowed it not only to integrate historical customer data but also stitch together visitor information from email opens and website visits.

Using a centralized database for customer relationship management allowed Princess Cruises to create more targeted communications and campaigns, both on its website and through other channels, leading to a reported 65% in campaign cost savings and a substantial increase in its ability to identify audiences.

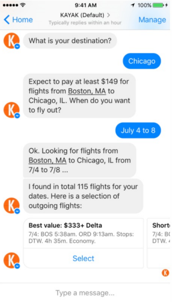
Kayak's Personal Assistant

Traditionally, booking travel was a highly personalized service experience in the pre-internet days. Many frequent travelers had a dedicated agent with whom they made all arrangements. This agent had the opportunity to speak with their clients, ask questions and learn their preferences. The result was an intensely personalized service that could easily guide a traveler from a general impression of a trip through to a fully booked itinerary.

While a completely AI-powered travel agent may still be a thing of the future, smart chatbots have begun to simulate this experience.

Travel booking site, Kayak, for example, has implemented AI-powered chat bots through Facebook Messenger, Slack, Amazon Alexa, and Google Assistant. The Facebook Messenger chatbot, in particular, shows the powerful potential of personalization in the travel industry.

This chatbot does more than perform search queries: it maintains a history of conversations with each customer and uses this to tailor its questions, answers and the recommendations it provides.



What is your destination?

Chicago

Expect to pay at least $149 for flights from Boston, MA to Chicago, IL. When do you want to fly out?

July 4 to 8

Ok. Looking for flights from Boston, MA to Chicago, IL from 7/4 to 7/8 ...

I found in total 115 flights for your dates. Here is a selection of outgoing flights:

Best value: $333+ Delta
7/4: BOS 5:38am. ORD 9:13am. Stops: DTW. 4h 35m. Economy.

Photo Courtesy of Kayak.com

Customers can use the chatbot to search for flights, hotels, rental cars, and activities. The chatbot also provides travel and trip updates. It can also answer some questions a traveler might have while the trip is underway.

Delta Airlines' Efforts to Connect Online to In-Person

While much of travel research, planning and booking now happen online, the most critical part of the customer's experience takes place in the physical world. Traditionally, the rich data that is collected online and used to optimize the digital experience is lost once the customer disconnects.

Delta, however, is making an effort to integrate the online and physical experience with the airline. Flight attendants, for example, have been equipped with tablets that they use to reference important safety information and take customer orders while in flight.

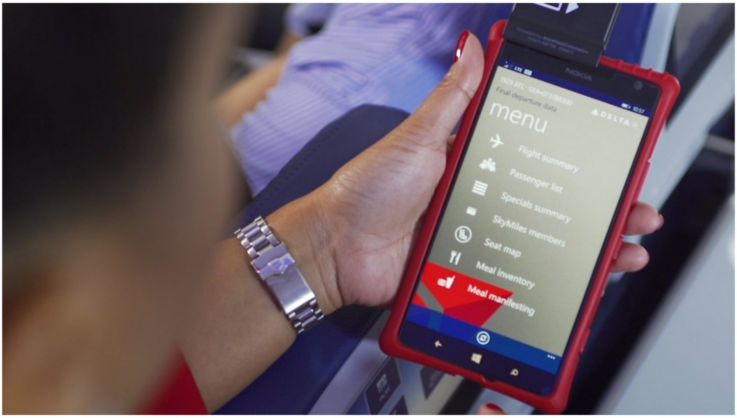


Photo Courtesy: Delta Airlines

Increasingly, however, these same tablets are augmented with passenger information, including preferences, loyalty program status, history and more. This allows flight attendants to, for example, refer to passengers by name, in addition to providing more personalized services.

Managing A Magical Customer Experience at Disney World

If the example of Delta suggests a way in which the entire customer travel experience can be personalized in a small way, Disney World offers an example of what can be accomplished with data integration at a large scale

At Disney Parks and Resorts, the goal is to "make the mundane magical." To do this, parks have introduced online features that allow visitors to make reservations, monitor queue length, request information and book experiences. Accessible via mobile app or website, this profile is the first step in their personalization system.

In addition, Disney World features a wristband that serves as a ticket, room key and even payment method. This allows Disney to track visitor behavior and offer personalized and immersive opportunities throughout the duration of a visit.

Photo courtesy: Disney World

While this comprehensive and immersive experience management may be out of the scope of many businesses, there is at least one important lesson for personalization strategy in general: Through the clever use of its various systems to schedule and tailor a visit to a park, Disney has provided a platform for and an incentive to create an authenticated identity and, moreover, for customers to use this identity throughout their experience.

Booking.com: Bringing It All Together

The previous examples suggest specific approaches personalization, at both a micro and macro-levels. Any one of these approaches can provide a degree of personalization. However, by combining many techniques, a more thoroughly tailored experience can be created.

This is precisely the strategy used by Booking.com to create a thoroughly personalized experience on its website.

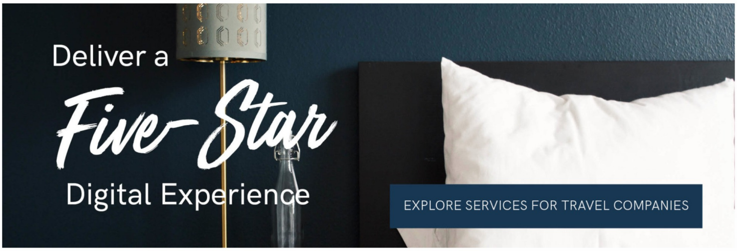
From the moment a customer lands on the page, they are introduced to targeted promotions and messages based on immediately available data.

In addition, customers see calls to log in or register, which provides an incentive to link their visits to a more robust database of customer information and records of behavior. As the customer clicks and searches, the recommendations become more and more specific.

This is augmented with concierge-style services powered by AI chatbots, an app that provides relevant push notifications and integrated campaigns across multiple channels.

Personalization is often talked about in terms that makes it hard to fully pin down. On one hand, it's a developing technology that promises individualized solutions to nearly every consumer problem. On the other, it's a core business competency that all competitive organizations should have already implemented.

However, when specific elements of customer experience optimization, data management and segmentation are considered as part of a broader personalization strategy, it is easier to see how your program might take shape. These seven examples above are a great place to get started.



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