

Travolution Summit ? the future of online travel

Wed, Apr 22, 2009 | Posted by [Jeremy Head](#)

We had a great day at the [Travolution Summit in London](#) yesterday. iCrossing was sponsoring the media centre and the front three rows of the room were packed with bloggers and online journalists from the Times, Sunday Times, Travel Weekly and Travolution jostling for space ? both literal (what does a blogger have to do to find a spare plug socket for his laptop?) and virtual (how quickly can I post my insights on the Twitter feed?)

You can see some of the debate that took place on the feed now: [hashtag/ travsummit](#)

Here?s my far from exhaustive run down of interesting insights:

User Experience is the new marketing

Marko Ahtisaari the CEO of [Dopplr](#)

said some extremely pertinent stuff. If there?s one element of travel websites that needs working on to achieve increased conversion at the moment ? it?s UX. (With quality, unique content a close 2nd?)

No frills airlines are on the way out

The mother of all low Cost Carriers [SouthWest airlines](#) is suddenly pursuing a strategy of selling itself as a ?services included? carrier (Low fares? no hidden fees) to distinguish itself from its competitors! This is the most remarkable turn around in the airline industry ever! Will the low cost model be superceded as travellers tire of paying extra for just about everything? (God I hope so, but I doubt it)

It?s cool to be boring

UK and Ireland [Lufthansa](#)

GM Marianne Sammann said that sometimes they are called ?boring? because Lufthansa just focuses on doing the basics as well as they can. (And they sure do that.) I wonder if boring is a good characteristic in the current climate? Forget funky stuff ? focus on being dependable and trustworthy.

Holiday homes are ripe for a social space

US based holiday home rentals company [HomeAway](#)

is growing ? very fast. It?s adding 15- 20,000 new properties each month. According to CEO Brian Sharples they just intend to focus on the basics (see that same theme ? focus on the simple stuff?). BUT there?s huge demand for people to exchange information and discuss online. Anyone fancy setting up a social space? Is there one already?

Facebook apps do work!

I don?t know the exact stats but it?s oft-quoted that of the many tens of thousands of apps on Facebook only

a few have been downloaded by more than a handful of people. But get an app right and it can turbocharge your business. Trip Advisor's restaurant reviews were paltry compared to their hotel reviews. Then they launched their [Local Picks Facebook app](#). The app generated 10s of thousands of reviews in a matter months from people who wouldn't usually visit the Trip Advisor site. It now provides more than 250,000 new pieces of restaurants to the Trip Advisor site each month.

Just keep it simple!

This was another of Marko Ahtisaari's mantras that I liked. As someone else on the panel for this session pointed out - the Online Travel Agencies growing fastest are those selling the simpler products (ie JUST hotels or JUST flights rather than the complete package). And that's not surprising given how complex a product travel can be with all the bits and pieces associated with booking a holiday. But are people trying too hard to be all things to all people? Maybe we will see the emergence of smaller niche operators (or - more likely perhaps - niche brands created by bigger players) doing increasingly good business by focussing on a specific audience and serving it really really well.

Here's the official Travolution Summit Widget