

COLUMNS

## Travel brands poised to grow exponentially with mobile marketing

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*Sky's the limit with mobile. Image courtesy of Expedia*

By **Tony Tie**

The world is on the move. Spending on travel and tourism is constantly increasing, and so is the use of mobile devices to plan and book trips.

In fact, some estimates say that by 2017, more than 30 percent of online travel bookings will be made on a smartphone. That is a huge portion of the market, and it is essential that travel brands adjust their mobile strategies to attract and hold customers' attention.

No longer just an option

In today's on-demand world, customers expect to have access to everything they need through their mobile devices.

In fact, 71 percent of users who encounter a non-mobile-optimized site will immediately click away.

If customers cannot easily find all the information that they are seeking on your mobile site, they will move on to the next one.

This is especially important for travel brands because if users are searching on their mobile devices, they are most likely close to purchasing.

The majority of mobile hotel bookings are made within 24 hours of a stay. But a great mobile Web site is only one part of a successful mobile marketing strategy.

Travel brands need to consider other aspects of mobile marketing, too, including:

Local search engine optimization (SEO): This ensures that your hotel or business shows up when someone searches a specific place.

For hotels, especially, practically every search is local, so building great local SEO is a must for closing the deal. Be sure that your business' name, address and phone number are available and consistent, and make sure you are managing the Google pages for your various locations by claiming them through Google My Business.

You can also complete your location profiles with images and information to establish a consistent message and branding.

Social media: This is where you first capture the consumer's attention

social media. This is where you must capture the consumer's attention.

Once you get them dreaming with great content and attention-grabbing photos, point them back to your business, and position it as a solution to help them make their dreams come true.

Personalized content: The more personalized content and advice you provide, the more successful your mobile efforts will be.

More than 75 percent of consumers are willing to share their location if they are getting something of value in return.

Although there are a lot of moving parts to a great mobile strategy, it does not have to be overwhelming. You just need to know where to start.

#### Getting started with mobile

As you build your strategy, consider all your options, and start working on the pieces you are missing.

Start by getting in your customers' heads. Know who they are and what they do. What are they looking for in travel? What are they interested in experiencing from your brand?

Whatever your next steps are, they need to be directly tailored to your current and prospective customers. Otherwise, you are just wasting time and money.

Here are a few other key components for all marketers to consider:

1. Build for mobile. For some brands, this means a mobile-optimized Web site. For others, it might mean a mobile application. But how do you know what is best for your business?

Building an app can boost awareness and loyalty, but you have to be careful to provide the right value to your customers.

There is only so much app space on a smartphone and only about 16 percent of people will try out a single app more than twice so if you can provide unique benefits through an app, go for it.

Otherwise, focus on making your Web site mobile-optimized, simple to use and quick to load.

2. Start texting. Do not be afraid to text. Especially for travelers, text options offer a huge benefit.

In fact, 95 percent of customers who opt into texting programs will open and read mobile messages within three minutes. That is faster than email and app notifications.

Use texts to provide exclusive offers uniquely tailored to what the customer values.

If you provide valuable information, chances are good that the customer will click on a text.

3. Keep it simple. Do not make your address, contact information or hours hard to find.

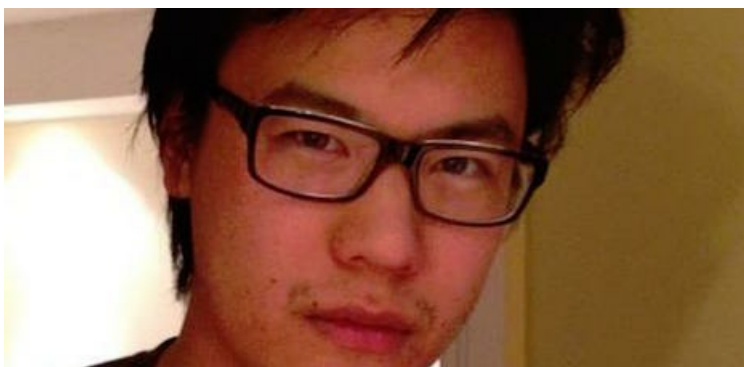
Ninety percent of local mobile searches end in conversion, so it is in your best interest to make everything easy to locate with as few clicks as possible.

4. Keep track. As with any marketing strategy, do not forget analytics.

Constantly evaluate performance so that you can provide the best value for your customers and get your brand in front of as many new travelers as possible.

IN CASE YOU have not heard, mobile is here to stay.

Travel brands that want to win will start shifting their marketing strategies to meet customers where they are: on their smartphones.





*Tony Tie is senior search marketer at Expedia*

*Tony Tie is senior search marketer at **Expedia**, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Reach him at [tie@expedia.com](mailto:tie@expedia.com).*

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