

Diversify, become easy to navigate and streamline services in 2016 or prepare to wave bye-bye to customers by Charlotte Lamp Davies, vice president of Travel & Hospitality DataArt Europe

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As the shared economy phenomenon continues its march forward it's clear that a brave new world for the travel and hospitality industry is right around the corner.

And at the recent Phocuswright conference in the US, which brings together senior travel and hospitality executives, we caught a glimpse of what could be in store for 2016.

The conference is a great place to start. One of the major talking points at Phocuswright concentrated on how the traditional mainstream players have been somewhat slow to react to the changing nature of modern travel and hospitality. But with the arrival of AirBnB, the 'old boys' have now been forced to sit up and take notice. So much so that major players like Booking.com and Expedia have diversified their services in order to claim their slice of the cake. Expedia's acquisition of HomeAway and Booking.com's purchase of Open Table represent very aggressive moves into the rental and restaurant markets respectively.

Then there is the growing prospect that smart technology might become a real possibility for 2016. It seems consistently to be top of the prediction list, but with Internet of things (IoT) it is no longer some far-fetched idea but a reality.

Because of the enhanced technology now available, mobile will move faster than ever before. IoT allows several devices to correspond with one another and in time the novel 'toys' that it enables, such as Smart watches etc., will come to be the technologies we rely on everyday. But more importantly it will be a key player in hospitality, as it will be used for making easy reservations, quick check-ins and much more.

So, how can OTAs (Online Travel Agencies) make up the ground?

1. Diversify their services

Identifying the importance of catering to as many of the travellers' needs and desires is key to success these days. Offering one platform is a must, making it an easy journey from start to finish. 2016 will see the arrival of more diverse yet streamlined customer services.

2. Make the platform easy to navigate

More and more consumers are shifting to handsets rather than desktops when searching for traffic. This year saw a 50% growth in travel related mobile searches with Google's new interface leading the field. The initial destination search presents users with an inspiring digest of relevant content, even suggesting best travel date based on weather and price.

3. Streamline your customer services

Streamlining will be king in 2016.

As for innovations in this field, I suggest a look at Tansler inc – a vacation rental marketplace that allows renters to name their price, choose multiple homes and submit one binding offer. Then there is Travefy – a travel-planning platform with tools to collaborate on trip details, build extensive itineraries, and collect shared expenses. A particular favourite of mine, Trekkable - a service that helps to find and book the best accessible rooms for those with mobility challenges. And finally, Proxce – a system using Bluetooth and

Geofencing to identify guests in real time allowing auto check-in, keyless entry to hotel rooms and personalized non-intrusive contextual content, be it in a hotel, airport or a restaurant.

Strap in for 2016, because we are set for a hell of a ride.

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