



Admin it – True Innovation in Travel is a bit of Myth

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NB: This is a viewpoint from Dmitry Bagrov, managing director at [DataArt](#).

Different sources give slightly various definitions for “innovation”, but all of them agree that it is something new that is being introduced to our life, whether it is a new idea, method, or device.

I have often found it really amusing to read through the many definitions. They remind me of people trying to define what “democracy” is and agreeing that it is derived from the Greek demos “the people” + kratia “power, rule”, and all of them having a different idea who are those “people” exactly and what is included in the “power” thing.

Same about innovation, really. When is an idea or device are new? Is the Samsung Galaxy S4 an innovative device? Is the iPhone5?

They are obviously new, but hardly innovative. The first Blackberry hit the spot, however, because it opened up a whole world of opportunities for everybody else. Same for the first iPhone.

Perhaps this would be my definition of an innovation: something new, whether it is a truly new thing or a new combination of things that have been around for a while, but necessarily something that opens up entirely new opportunities for the rest of the market, at the same time killing off a section of the market that becomes outdated.

The subject came up when I was as a panelist recently at a Question Time event DataArt hosted in London. I suggested innovation per se was a bit of a myth in the travel industry.



Online travel – the ability for the general public to book holidays, flights and other related products without leaving their homes – was an innovation.

It took the elements already there (web, payment gateways, etc.) and combined them in a slightly new way, thus creating a world of opportunities for the market and effectively killing, or severely injuring, traditional high street travel agents.

Everything that has happened in travel since then has been a process of honing and refining things to make the process more convenient and natural for a user and provider, but it does not bring totally new opportunities. Well, not yet.

- Mobile? Effectively, it is merely a way for a computer (and therefore all the merchants selling stuff online) to leave the desk and follow you everywhere.
- Cloud? Well the computer now has to be packed down to the size of a smartphone, and can't have everything on it, so let's have access to everything instead with the said everything being stored somewhere else.
- Big Data? Well there has always been is A LOT of data kicking about.

Are these innovative?

There have been plenty of technological advances – and some exciting ones, too, but I did not throw away my desktop computer because I have a smartphone, and my music collection is still sitting snugly on its hard drive (although, admittedly, the rarely listened to parts have been moved to the iTunes cloud), and Big Data methods are certainly providing me with tools to support my decision-making and thinking process, but they are not replacing it.

So, imagine though that suddenly small aircraft become as widely and – most importantly – easily used as cars.

That will be a true innovation: imagine what kind of possibilities for travel it will create, and what will happen to car rental and short haul airlines!

Or if we finally get rid of the image of the burning Hindenburg crashing down from our collective subconsciousness and faster airships will come back to roam the skies?

That will be a true innovation – air travel made comfortable for the masses again – and will also put pressure on traditional airlines (there seem to be many things that can ruin them these days, indeed).

My belief is that everything currently paraded as innovative in travel is in fact upgrading and updating what is already there, introducing new features at best.

True innovation is yet to arrive, but I can bet that when it does hit us it will come from an unexpected direction. And, then, it will be really exciting and worthy of the “innovation” monicker.

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NB2: [Photos from the Question Time event on the Tnooz Facebook page](#).

NB3: [Myth vs reality](#) image via Shutterstock.

Read more at <http://www.tnooz.com/2013/07/12/news/admit-it-true-innovation-in-travel-is-a-bit-of-myth/#DehZLg211eqF1LM5.99>