

Stylus Sample

Social Media Travel Revolution
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A person in a red kayak is shown from behind, paddling on a body of water. The kayak has blue gear on board. In the background, a large, rounded rock formation is visible under a clear blue sky. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent grey filter.

TRAVEL

Social Media Travel Revolution



Social media is impacting every industry and changing the way we approach our lives. With more than 1.6 billion tourist visits due in 2012 – accounting for 9% of global GDP – the commercial opportunities of the social web are a hot topic in the global travel industry.

Front cover:

US-based AirBnB
networking site.

Below:

US-based AirBnB
networking site.

Opposite page (T-B):

US-based Social Flights.

Europe-based private
jet company Victor.

Excursionist
kayaking in Greenland.

Excursionist
turtle diving in Oman.

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Brands are winning new customers via social networks and, according to UK business publication Marketing Week, 52% of companies are using social networking to engage with their audiences.

New Business Models: Social Jetsetting

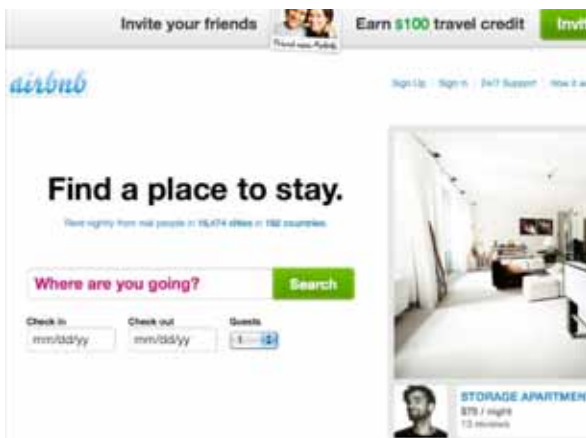
Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg forecasts that social dynamics are going to work their way into every industry. And the most successful companies of the future will be the ones that 'bake in' social components from the beginning.

Social Flights: This 'baked in' approach is embraced by CEO Jay Deragon, whose Beta-tested website Social Flights offers everyday travellers within the US the option to purchase an individual seat on an available private jet (or charter a whole plane at an affordable rate).

Just a few months into the venture and his 8,400 members have access to a fleet of more than 500 aircraft. Deragon has spotted an opportunity in the US market where, on any given day, 60% of the country's 15,000 top-rated charter jets would otherwise go unused.

As he points out, the social web gives people the ability to self-organise, so why not enable them to self-organise into groups that want to fly to the same place at the same time ... and then facilitate a plane for them?"

Victor: It's a similar story in Europe, where private jets carry an average of 2.2 passengers – in aircraft that could seat eight to 12 – with 40% flying empty on at least one leg of their itinerary. It is this under-utilised capacity, and flexibility of itinerary, which entrepreneur Clive Jackson is making available to pan-European travellers, through his pioneering new business.





Power of the Crowd

Both these companies thrive on the participation of their membership – to help determine the most desirable new routes, and efficiently manage future demand.

Most interestingly, the model sees members play a big part in rallying to fill the available planes. Members can post a desired point-to-point trip, or book onto an existing itinerary, then mobilise their social network connections to fill up the allocated plane. This interaction brings down individual seat prices, often to lower than commercial airlines. It's an impressive example of the 'power of the crowd'.

Peer-to-Peer Influence: Using Social Media

According to Travelsat, 69% of travel companies have seen an increase in traffic due to launching a Facebook profile, and 46% have experienced an increase in traffic via Twitter. The trend for 2012 points towards social media becoming a critical tool for companies looking to deliver the best customer service. For example, Delta Air Lines already has at least 10 staff managing customer service issues 24/7 through its @DeltaAssist Twitter channel.

While there is still a role for brand-to-consumer services – with sites such as Excursionist offering a new breed of completely tailored travel experience – it's the peer-to-peer recommendation sites that are driving the greatest traffic.



tripl

Making your lifestyle global through travel.
Add your email to join our beta list.

your@email.com **Go!**

f t t i

 NYC looks huge. Glad, Dave recommended his friend.



While more than 50 million social reviews have been created on TripAdvisor, one of the biggest hits of the past year has been Tripatini – a travel-dedicated social media and booking site. Dubbed “Facebook for travellers” by the *New York Post*, it has been lauded for harmoniously bringing together travel industry experts with the travel-loving public in Q&A-style dialogue. Its fledgling YouTube channel also has potential – tapping into the trend towards demand for advisory/documentary moving image content. .

Technomads: The ‘Do It Yourself’ Demographic

There is still growing popularity surrounding sites powered entirely by peer-to-peer networking. Since launching in 2008, US-based AirBnB has facilitated 1.6 million stays and transacted \$80 million in bookings. For travellers on less (or no) budget, the hugely popular Couchsurfing facilitates free stays with other members worldwide. Since launching in 2004, it has facilitated more than 3.4 million stays with no transaction fees at all.

Similarly, Tripl – a recent social travel start-up – connects travellers with each other, locals and friends of friends for recommendations while visiting each others’ cities, by leveraging Facebook users’ social graphs.

Choosing to bypass the traditional organisational routes is a strong trait of the emerging ‘do it yourself’ demographic of Technomads – a worldwide generation who utilise all the initiatives offered by digital developments to independently manage their complete travel requirements.

At the more ‘open sourced’ end of the spectrum, in September 2011, Foursquare held its annual global hackathon – challenging developers to create new apps using the Foursquare API (an Application Programming Interface, allowing other programmes to link to Foursquare’s user data). The winner was Plan Your Next Trip, which allows users to plan a two-day trip to any location, based on recommendations from friends and previous Foursquare check-ins.

Smart Travel on Smartphones

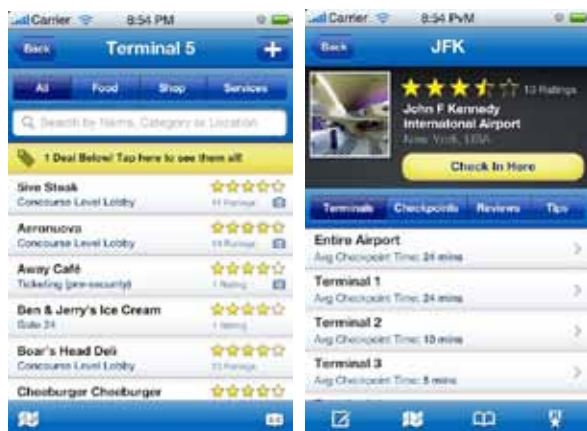
A recent survey by Airport Parking & Hotels (APH) found that 33% of frequent flyers now rely on their smartphones to book and manage their trips – a figure that is set to increase rapidly as the mobile-dedicated services offered by travel companies improve. For example, nine in 10 airlines are actively selling or plan to sell seats through mobile phones by 2014. Many already offer complete smartphone check-in services and boarding pass functionality.

One example of a current mobile service app is GateGuru. This tool, popular with US and European travellers, aims to ease the dilemma of navigating the best of global airports' food, beverage and shopping offers, while also gathering user intelligence on average restaurant wait times and transit issues.

However, there is one obstacle to the domination of mobile-led travel. Although 72% of social media users interact with their networks on the go – which should mark out the smartphone as the ideal portal for integrated social travel services in the future – currently, only 7% of smartphone users access mobile internet services while overseas, as roaming tariffs and restricted wi-fi currently limit accessibility.

One service making waves in air-to-ground internet connectivity is GoGo WiFi, which beams wi-fi skywards from ground-based transmitters. In 2011 alone, more than 200 million passengers will board GoGo-enabled flights.

All in all, that's a pretty good beginning to the digitally-powered travel revolution.



Article References

[Social Flights](#)

[Victor](#)

[@DeltaAssist](#)

[Excursionist](#)

[TripAdvisor](#)

[Tripatini](#)

[YouTube](#)

[AirBnB](#)

[Couchsurfing](#)

[Tripl](#)

[Plan Your Next Trip](#)

[GateGuru](#)

[GoGo WiFi](#)

Previous page:

[Tripl.com](#).

This page:

[GateGuru app](#),
a complete airport
guide.

Stylus Summary

Consider the potential of allowing your consumer audience to organise themselves around the versions of your services that are most preferential to them. Businesses could learn a lot about the true priorities of their community.

Consumers have recently invested in building up their social networks. They are now ready to mobilise these networks for their lifestyle gain. What can your customers bring to your business model that equally benefits both you and them?

To combat the preference for peer-to-peer sites, customer service is critical. Brands being there – and being accessible – for their customers while on the go is essential.

Are you storing up useful social/travel data? If so, have you considered how much more beneficial it could be to you, and your audience, if you made it available to your community through an API (Application Programming Interface), allowing other programmes to link to your data? What new services could it provide for your business?

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inspiration@stylus.com

+44 (0) 20 3170 7119 (EMEA)

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AARON LEE
PACKAGE DESIGN MANAGER, MEIJER

meijer