In Conversation with
Sandeep Dwivedi

The use of Digital wallet is going to redefine the way travel is sold and make it an easier, safer and seamless process. Going cashless for business or fun would be the new way of booking travel. Sandeep Dwivedi

The frequent technological innovations have given travel companies numerous opportunities and floated a lot of expectations among them. During last few years, the Indian travel industry has grown exponentially. It has given birth to numerous technological innovations which have, in response, created a milieu of online travel related services. However, keeping pace with technology is the most challenging task as what was great a few years ago, is almost obsolete today.

In an attempt to keeping pace with the technology (new entrant or existing) and understand its impact on the entire travel industry, we approached the most advanced technology player - InterGlobe Technology Quotient and had an opportunity to interact with none other than the Chief Commercial Officer of the company Sandeep Dwivedi. Here are the excerpts of this conversation.

Rajesh Tiwari

According to you which is the latest technology or software that will leave its impact on the entire travel industry in the year ahead? Is it a new entrant or existing technology that will shape the way for more growth in 2016?

As per the latest technological developments the most influential change is the introduction of e-Visa. Although, this was introduced in the year 2014, but its expansion to include 150 countries worldwide is causing the desired impact of connecting more and more inbound tourists to the country, thereby benefitting the national tourism sector.

Another important evolution in the field of technology is Smartphone penetration and the resultant use of Digital wallet- not only as a travel booker or surfer device, but also as a payer of funds. The 2016 is going to be an important year for online payments in the travel sector. Although, Digital wallet is still making its presence felt in the travel domain, Smartphone penetration is relatively low in India. As per Vserv, India has over 160 million smartphone users and this user base is estimated to grow at a CAGR of 26 percent from 2013 to 2017. The interactions of these smartphone users with their devices is generating vast amount of information. However, this information is not yet being understood and utilised efficiently.

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Innovations in travel technology have floated a lot of expectations among the small travel agents; however where do we really stand at this point of time in terms of reaching to the end users?

Although technological innovations have etched a new phase in travel world but making them accessible to travel agents far and wide has become a challenge. Reaching out to the small travel agent needs a cumulative effort of the industry so that these new introductions can be passed on to all travel agents and they can service their customers with the best available options as well as facilities.

For the same purpose, InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ) has introduced numerous initiatives in the past. One such step was the launch of soft skill trainings for travel agents across India, where our trainers trained the travel agents and their frontline staff on various skill development techniques. We also conduct networking sessions where we introduce the latest technologically advanced products that delivers superior quality of services once installed.

What is the current market scenario of travel technology space in India?

The Indian travel market has grown exponentially in the recent years. During the last few years, it has given birth to numerous technological innovations which have, in response, created a milieu of online travel related services. Presently, travel market is thriving in the technology area and in order to suffice the necessities of the domain, the GDS sector has also evolved abundantly. It has become more user-focused which has made travel surfing and booking for travel agents a far easier job. The advanced set of features has made GDS smarter with time thereby contributing further in the area of travel technology.

Which are the other countries leading in travel and technology space, and where do we (India) stand? What is the advantage/disadvantage we do have in India?

The increased penetration of Smartphone has become the key estimator of adoption in travel technology. In the Asia Pacific, China stands at the highest level of technology adoption as the country hosts the largest population of Smartphone users in the region at present. Its travel and technology space has also emulated the technologically smart version to stay ahead in the present context. But due to the slowing economy it will probably lose its superior position in the coming years.

On the other hand, India is booming in the travel and technology space. Multiple measures are being taken up in the regard to make the industry more organised and profitable. As per the India Aviation Report by KPMG and FICCI, India will emerge as the 3rd largest aviation market by 2020. And in order to support this boom, efficient technology should be in place. As a developing country, we have immense potential to make our tourism market grow and flourish.

Have you noticed any latest trend in this space? What role will be played by Smartphone and social media sites?

Travel is bought and sold every second of the day, and we see that both online and offline reach out has become equally essential for distribution. However recently with the increase in Smartphone use, everything has become 'mobile'. Apps, payments, shopping surfing have become a matter of few clicks. We are presently living in an age, where technological innovation has become crucial. As a result of this, 'smarter' steps have been initiated to revolutionise products and services in the industry. Today, Smartphone have turn out to be essential tool for booking and surfing travel.

Also technology has offered an innovative way of experiencing travel without moving an inch through virtual reality. Many organisations have come up with ideas to push the reality a bit farther and helping travellers to explore the pleasure of being in a faraway land, without being present there in reality. And the remarkable thing is this trend is gaining more and more acceptance with time.

Social media has become the medium of estimation and presentation, now-a-days. A common man's rich resource of information who zeroes-in on a location based on the reviews on social media channels. Needless to say, social media has also become a strong advertising platform where travelers get their information on trips and exclusive offers.

What are the latest initiatives or development at ITQ that you would like to share with us?

Launch of skill development initiative in collaboration with CAP foundation has been a big step for us. We have initiated this program to train underprivileged children with skills required to begin a career journey in the travel world. This program would benefit 300 students and help them build a brighter future for themselves. They will be trained in 5 different regions across India and made ready for the travel world.

We conduct 'Student of the Year' contest every year with an objective to identify the best performing students in the travel domain and give them a chance to begin their professional journey in the best way possible. The entire process of online selection, evaluation and nomination of the top performing students happen through a series of tests that give these students an opportunity to analyze their skills and knowledge. In addition, the exposure they get through this contest is beneficial for them in terms of confidence and professionalism.

Is there any new technology/updated version that may hit the Indian market in near future from your end?

We are in the process of upgrading Travelport Smartpoint. The latest version would further add to the technological evolution thereby making the process of travel booking even more seamless for our travel partners. The modified version will offer a futuristic interface that will deliver exceptional travel business experience across boundaries. It will be an one-stop shop travel booking platform that will continue to offer updated content, ancillaries, images of cabins and seats in a single window, accurate product description, ancillaries provided within the fare and much more. In the age of automation, Smartpoint will continue to offer exceptional services.

The important evolution in the field of technology is Smartphone penetration and the resultant use of Digital wallet- not only as a travel booker or surfer device, but also as a payer of funds. The 2016 is going to be an important year for online payments in the travel sector.

Sandeep Dwivedi

Kindly throw some light on Travelport Rich Content & Branding? Why is it attracting more and more airlines?

More than 150 airlines have selected Travelport Rich Content and Branding within a short span of two years. This favoritism is because Rich Content and Branding addresses certain key challenges the travel industry faces today. It is a ground-breaking technology product that enables airlines to display and market their fares, ancillaries and brand proposition to travel agents as they would on their own websites.

This provides airlines with greater control on how their content is visually presented. With rich product descriptions and graphics, the platform is designed to allow airlines to implement sophisticated retailing techniques that align with their product branding in order to drive sales of core fares, ancillary products and optional services such as seats with extra legroom.