

How Translation Technology is Shaping the Future of the Global Traveler Experience

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With global travel continuing to rise, consumers are increasingly researching, planning, and booking travel on the Web and via mobile devices. Travel brands, recognizing the opportunity to earn customer loyalty and capture a greater share of bookings through direct channels, have responded by investing heavily in the creation of branded content at every consumer touchpoint.

At the same time, the greatest opportunities for growth exist in markets like China, India, and Southeast Asia, where a multitude of languages are spoken. Travel brands have always recognized the need to publish content in multiple languages, but the explosion in the amount of content now being created, coupled with a growing number of languages to support an increasingly diverse consumer base, is resulting in scalability challenges that aren't easily overcome by with traditional approaches to translation. These challenges threaten to impair direct channel performance, creating new openings for OTAs and aggregators.

“The traditional approach to translation is extremely manual and relies heavily on pre-Web technologies like email and spreadsheets,” said Kevin Cohn, SVP of Operations for Smartling, a provider of enterprise translation management software and services. And the work is decentralized: Travel brands have different teams creating content for Web and mobile, customer loyalty emails, the in-flight and in-room experience, and even employee training documentation—all of which has to be translated. Cohn says that without a system of record for translation, quality is inconsistent, deadlines are missed, and collaboration is virtually impossible.

This low-tech state of affairs stands in stark contrast to the significant investment that travel brands are making in technology generally. Increasingly, travel brands are embracing agile principles in order to develop their direct channels faster and be more responsive to evolving guest needs. However, traditional approaches to translation are anything but agile; the result is that it takes too long to introduce new languages, and the upkeep and refreshing of translated content lags behind that of the English content. The markets that represent the greatest opportunities for growth are at risk of being underserved.

For instance, InterContinental Hotels Group maintains 5,000 different websites and offers all of its consumer-facing content (including mobile content) in 19 languages, and considers translation management software to be critical to its success in building customer loyalty and direct channels. According to Chad Westfall, VP of global direct channels for IHG, the brand significantly reduced the amount of time it took to introduce Arabic, Dutch, Russian, and

Queen's English to its digital properties in 2015. For example, whereas it previously took six months to introduce a new language, IHG was able to introduce Arabic—a particularly challenging language due to its script and the fact that it's written right-to-left—in only a month.

“The need for travel brands to publish content in multiple languages has never been greater,” Cohn says. “As more investment is made in content and technology, it becomes increasingly important for global enterprises to view translation through a technology lens, and to invest in a system of record for managing translation, a process which ultimately touches nearly every department and team.”

This content is created collaboratively by Smartling and Skift's branded content studio SkiftX.

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