
A hand holding a pen pointing to a map of Sweden, with the title text overlaid.

2018's Top Trends in Travel Data That You Need to Watch Out For

Booking.com **business**



When it comes to managing business travellers and their expenses, data is key.

You need to process data from all sources: travellers, service providers and company records.

To what extent can you trust the accuracy of all the data that comes to you?

How do you filter out inaccurate numbers to generate reliable reports on spending trends or find the best offers for your business travellers?

At the end of the day, you want to reduce costs and save money for your company. Your goal is clear but to get there,

you need to take action from the very start by accessing the right data, and work efficiently throughout the process of collecting, analysing and reporting it.

Emerging travel data trends offer excellent solutions for every step of the way. If you know which technology developments will help your data management, you can make informed investment decisions that benefit both the company and your business travellers.

Here are emerging developments you need to watch for in 2018.



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Search engines that drive transparency for travel options and deals

— PICTURE THIS:

Travel agencies send their agents to millions of hotels, airlines, train operators and so on. They collect and store information in a giant encyclopedia, which the diligent agents will scour up and down to identify items that correspond to a keyword in a query from a traveller. Now, replace that encyclopedia with web indexes and the agents with a programmed spider that crawls the internet to consolidate and index findings based on provided keywords. You now have a search engine for the travel industry.

Search engines are the technology upon which many online travel businesses are built. We have metasearch engines - the

aggregating sites for travel deals searches like Kayak and Skyscanner, online travel agencies - companies like Expedia, and booking sites such as Hotels.com. As businesses evolve around search engines, their models overlap, and the boundary between them becomes blurry.

In 2018, we will see more of those businesses offer additional services to compete with others in a different sector.

Aggregating sites, which used to offer only search results, have started to include a booking function and compete with booking sites and travel agencies.

More online travel agencies will acquire metasearch engines or develop their own so that they can offer their customers more searching power. Users will be likely to see more sponsored search results pointing toward their partner hotels and airlines.

Booking sites will develop more sophisticated searching mechanisms, thus become capable of providing travellers with a lot more travel options. Users will be able to find alternative ways to travel,

for example, a bus route on a train booking platform or a self-service apartment on a site set up for hotel accommodation.

As the boundaries dissolve, buyers need to be aware of biased search engines, sponsored deals or recommended options. However, as providers move toward the one-stop shop model, it's easier for business travel planners to manage bookings, generate reports and control expenses.

Smarter search engines will also offer more personalised results. Travellers can find not only the cheapest but the most suitable options for their needs in less time.

We all do searches on Google, but how many of us look at the third page of results? Not many!

Similarly, busy business travellers might not look past the first ten deals on their search page. Filters are important and will continue to become more sophisticated, allowing users to customise their search to the last detail.

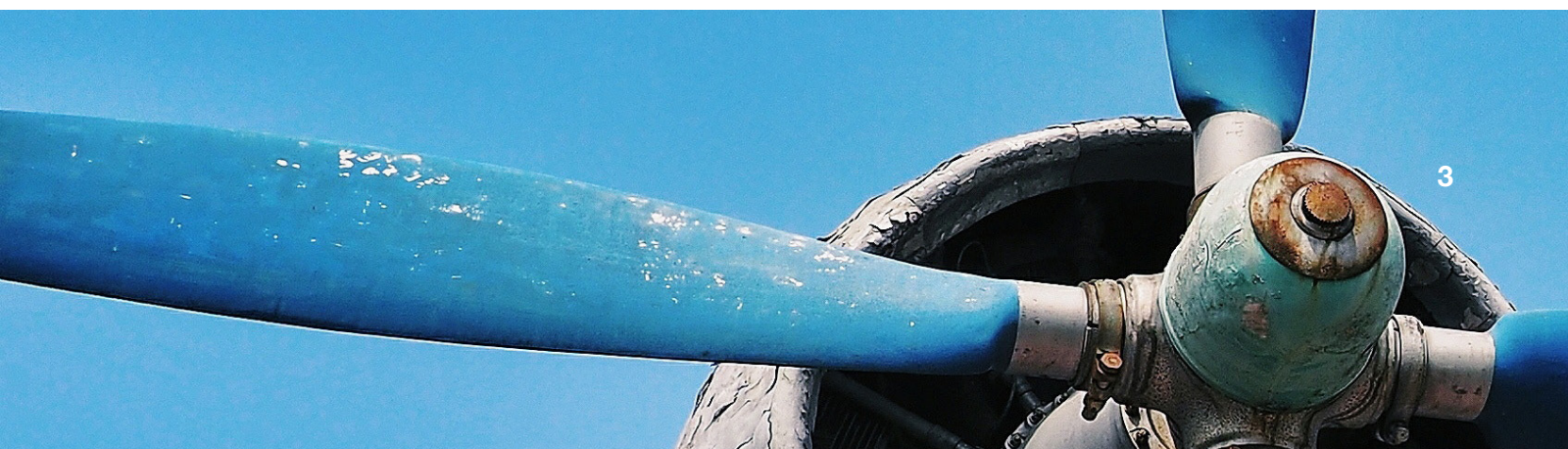
Travellers and travel planners will be able to find the most relevant

information more quickly.

If you look for a hotel on [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com), you can filter your search in multiple categories. There are options for budget, popularity, guest rating, number of stars, payment method, fun things to do, privacy, deals, property type, the facilities that you want, the facilities that a property has, preferred chain, favourite neighbourhood and so much more.

Remember how long it took to go to the website of a hotel, pick out all the details, and then repeat it over and over. You'd soon feel like punching the wall instead of the keyboard. And even when you'd found something, you wouldn't be sure you had the best price. Fortunately, this is now all in the past.

In 2018, search engines will continue to become smarter, more customisable and more powerful. They create transparency in travel data and enable access to the right deals so that you and your travellers can make smart decisions.



Artificial Intelligence will help travellers get the best value for their money

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the development of computer systems that can understand and mimic the human brain, thus they can perform tasks which used to require human intelligence.

As it develops, AI-powered tools will be able to break down complex travel decisions and pick a preferred option in less and less time. Let's look at a scenario that could actually happen in 2018.

Apps on your smart devices can "talk" to each other. When you add an event to your calendar app, like a three-day conference in Paris, your AI-powered virtual assistant will send you notifications for flight and hotel options in Paris. After she assists you with the booking, the confirmations are sent to your email. As your email app and your calendar app talk to each other, your assistant can take over and add the details of your flight and hotel to your calendar app without your having to do so yourself.

Do you use Google Maps? Of course, you do. Google Calendar? Yep, that as well. What's about Google Flights? Let's assume you are using all three of the Google tools mentioned above. You find yourself adding a three-day conference in Paris to your Google Calendar and promptly get a notification from Google Flights about air travel deals to Paris. You pick the best option, then book a hotel as well. And since you're organised, you add those details to your Google Calendar. Guess what? When you arrive at the Charles de Gaulle Airport, Google Maps sends you a notification about the traffic and ground transportation options to get to your hotel.


Seamless? Instant? Scary?

Maybe all of the above. But this is a very realistic scenario in 2018 with the advances in AI technology.

Here are some aspects of travel planning where AI can get you the best value and service for your money:

- **Chatbot assistance throughout the planning process**
For example, with a chatbot, you can have 24/7 contact and instant replies to any queries while your travel agent might be engaged or off now and then.
- **Personalised and relevant services, provided quickly and efficiently, at a lower price**
In a race between an AI-powered search engine and a travel agent to find the cheapest flight from New York to Sydney with the most spacious legroom and the shortest connection time, who do you think will win?
- **Best options for the next step of travel**
So you land at an airport, switch your phone back on and get an instant notification detailing on-the-ground travel options. Great, right? No need to ask for a taxi at an airport information desk and then end up trying to negotiate a fare with a driver in a language you can't speak and end up possibly being overcharged.
- **Cost-saving recommendations for the next trip**
As soon as an AI-powered system predicts unusually low prices on your regular travel route, you get an email letting you know so you can upgrade your flight and still stay within the travel policy. No need for you to track flight prices, do searches or compare numbers yourself.
- **Optimised disruption management**
Some travel solution providers provide algorithmic predictions based on travel data. They can tell you when they predict a long delay on one leg of your travel and will advise you to stay put and find you a good deal at the nearby hotel. You can use this recommendation based on their data analytics or you can ignore it and head to the planned destination anyway.

As a buyer, you should keep a watch out for these time-saving AI assistants, such as a chatbot or working with mobile push notifications, and the service providers that are offering them. Those providers could be ideal business partners that you can work with to help travellers get the best travel options, while also cutting the cost of business travel in your company.



Voice technology increasing the speed of travel searching and booking

6

Spot the guy talking to his wrist on the metro at 6 pm Friday night?

No, he hasn't finally snapped after a long week. Perhaps. He probably has an Apple smart watch and is asking Siri to check when his last train home leaves.

Welcome to the age of Voice Search technology!

Voice Search is a combination of data analysis and AI. With the ability to understand a command in human language, it is capable of scanning millions of options and possibilities to give you the most relevant results.

Apple Siri, Google Now, Windows Cortana and Amazon Alexa are the top runners in voice-activated chatbots. Their users can do searches without typing, and the results returned are based on a user's preferences, geographical location and saved search history.

Though voice technology has made a presence and attracted quite some attention in the travel data industry, the market is still fragmented. Your option is restricted to the device you own and the business decisions of the company who run its software.

At the moment, if you have an iPhone or an iPad, you get Siri as your smart assistant. When you use a voice command to request a flight search, you are likely to get a list of websites, the same as what you would get with a screen-based search.

If you have a Google Assistant, which comes with many Android smartphones, smartwatches and Google Home devices, you can use Voice Search on Google Flights and get comprehensive information on

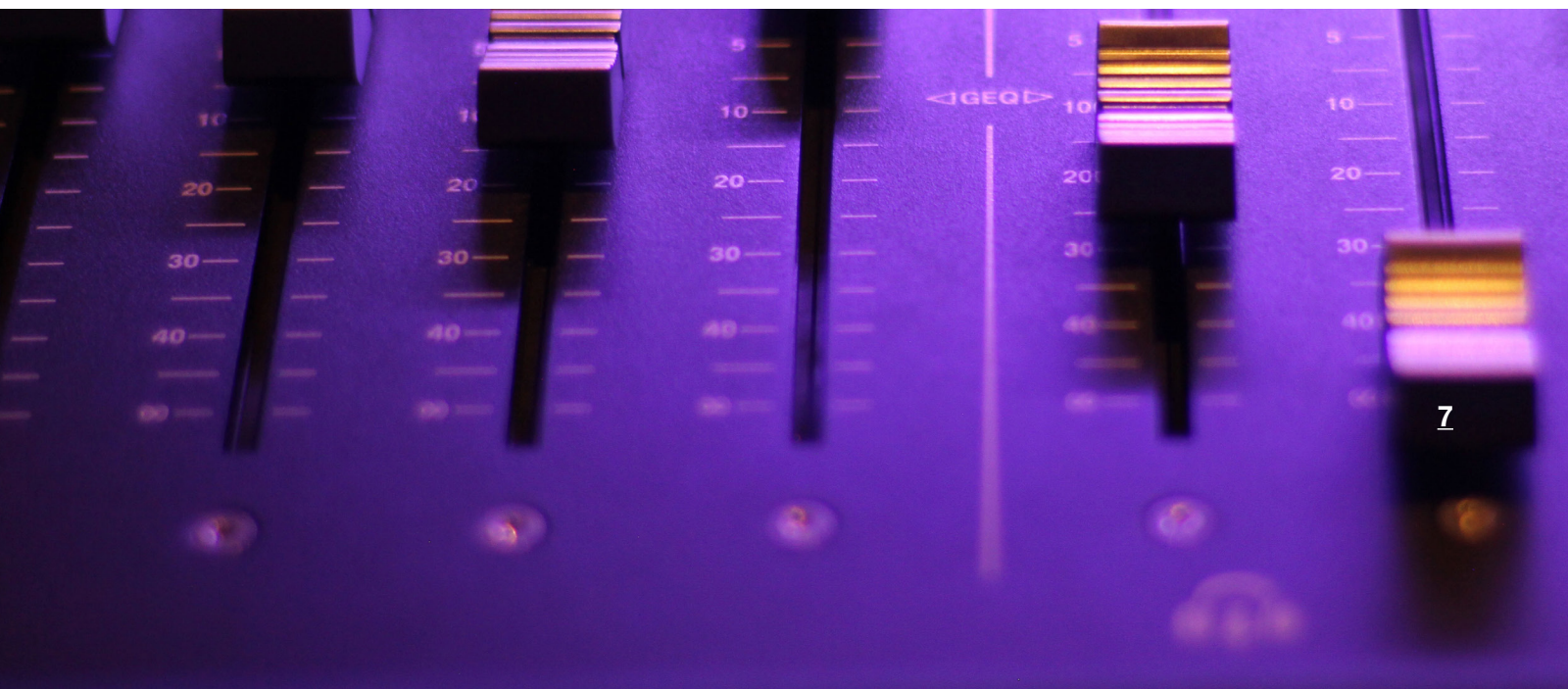
flight schedules, pricing and status. Voice-controlled ticket purchases are not available yet, but it is likely to go that direction.

With Amazon Echo and Alexa, you have a lot more options for voice-powered travel searching. Alexa understands Skills, a voice-powered app created by third-party developers. It means that when a travel solution provider has a Skill app, you can ask Alexa to reach the provider and do specific tasks. For example, you can tell Alexa to set a home airport or to track a flight on [Kayak](#). Kayak is not the only travel provider using this technology, with [Korean Air](#), [Uber](#), [Lyft](#) and [Flight Tracker](#) in the game as well. It is likely that more travel solution providers will follow their footsteps in 2018.

So a scenario like this is not too far off:

A business traveller, who frequently makes a trip from London to Istanbul, does a Voice Search for the next flight to Istanbul. Instead of giving her a list of results, her virtual assistant takes her straight to the airline she often uses. She can say another command to use her information to book the flight, then move on to search for a hotel in Istanbul. Again, she will be directed to the search page on a booking site of her choice. With all the filtering criteria saved, she can quickly scan through a few results and pick the one she likes the most. Another voice command and the hotel is booked.

Voice technology is significantly increasing the speed of searching for travel information, and soon it will be the same for booking a flight or a hotel. You will want to watch out for travel companies that offer these such services and consider whether partnering with them will help reduce the cost of your business travel. Remember, time is money.





More in-depth data analysis will help companies manage budgets and expenses

In 2018, business travel buyers will be able to cut costs thanks to transparency in travel data and availability of predictive analytics. The best travel deals can be found in less time and purchases can be made when the prices are at their lowest. But that is not all. The increasing capacity in travel data analytics will help buyers to manage budgets and expenses better than ever before. With the help of [benchmarking tools](#), travel buyers can get all rates in different cities at different times a year available at the touch of your button. That information tip the scale of negotiation in their favour.

The increase in digital tools and integrated systems steps up the amount of accurate travel data buyers can collect. For example, when hotel bookings for all business travellers within your company are made on one platform, you can easily export expense reports by each department or every quarter. You get reliable data faster, which is the foundation of trustworthy analytics.

As AI and techniques around big data machines are maturing, they can take over the tasks of analysing all collected travel data. It will be faster to find useful and applicable patterns in travel cost-saving. What buyers didn't have the time or the capacity to do previously, AI-powered systems can help them do in 2018.



CONSIDER THIS:

You can look at thousands of your company's business travel trips across the globe and accurately pinpoint the areas that your travellers spend more than is the standard in the industry. Is it air travel, accommodation or daily food and drink? Then you can investigate the reasons. Are you buying from an overpriced supplier or is it due to the spending behaviours of particular groups of travellers? Consequently, you can decide to find a different supplier or design incentives targeting that group and try to reduce open bookings or outside-policy spending. There are many things buyers can do to manage expenses and budgets, but the key is to interpret data correctly and learn where the problems lie.

As the capacity of analysing travel data increases, buyers who make it a priority to learn from their data will be able to save more on expenses and cut down the budget for business travellers.

In 2018, you will see search engines grow even more powerful, empowering business travellers with more deals in less and less time. AI technologies will appear in more aspects of travel assistance to provide travellers with a smooth trip at the lowest possible cost. The market for Voice Search is likely to stay fragmented, but more and more providers will allow information search and travel booking using a voice command. Finally, the capacity of data analysis will increase and give any buyers who pay attention, the ability to see the full picture and spot the weak points in their company's travel policy. All these trends in travel data bring tremendous opportunities to cut travel expenses and better manage the budget for travel.

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