



Back to Basics in a Crisis

In the world of travel there is always a buzz surrounding the next great shiny “thing” that is going to revolutionize the customer journey and experience. You've all experienced the fascination with AI, big data, experiential apps, augmented reality and so it carries on with the belief that conversion and customer experience can always be enhanced.

In a competitive industry such as travel it is essential to stay at the forefront of technological advances and how they can be used to improve the customer experience and opportunity. Achieving this often requires substantial investment in fledgling technologies and resources often to discover that only marginal gains are achieved which returns you to the search for that one “thing” to deliver a big win.

It is quite unclear how much these technology enhancements influence the customer's choice of tour operator or travel agent especially when one looks at the industry's conversion rates. What is seen, is the power of the review or social media delivering very publicly and instantaneously a customer's opinion on the performance of a business. The growth in strength of Feefo, Trip Advisor, Trust Pilot as well as the extensive use of social media such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook enables your customer to praise or damn in an instant, leaving their enduring view of your business and its performance. It is widely accepted in either traditional or online retail, the happiest, most loyal customer is often the one that experienced a problem but had that problem managed, resolved, and communicated in a professional and caring manner. Of course, in contrast, the most vocally dissatisfied customers are often the ones ranting about no follow up, no call back and ill informed staff.

Travel companies are acutely aware of the many external influences on their business that are outwith their control. Specifically crises are an unpredictable but inevitable part of that mix. Whether we are talking about crises brought on by extreme weather conditions such as this summer's hurricanes or the more sinister potential for terrorist activity, sadly seen in recent years – these scenarios have the potential to rock your business.

When a crisis hits and a crisis management plan whirrs into action it is essential to be confident that your customer communication will be rapid, relevant and regular. Quickly and automatically identifying potentially affected customers and their current journey stage is a vital first step to excellent crisis communications. Follow this with the ability to create simple relevant messages and then deliver those personalised messages to multiple mobile devices helps close the loop. By communicating quickly and effectively in a crisis you are most likely to receive understanding and positive feedback from your customers - They don't expect you to divert a hurricane but it's not

unreasonable for them to expect you to tell them how you can help and then deliver on that.

Leave your customers in the dark and you expose the business to significant risk from high recovery costs, share price impacts, lawsuits and reputation damage. You could also place customers' safety in jeopardy, at the very least your customers will become increasingly stressed and angry over your inability to manage them out of their situation and you can expect angry phone calls, damning reviews and inflamed conversations with the media. It is clear that smooth efficient handling of crisis communication is vital to protect your reputation, brand loyalty and share price.

So before you spend too much on that shiny new toy that may or may not deliver you marginal financial gains, get back to basics and make sure you are fully equipped to handle the next crisis that impacts your business - especially the vital communications that will define, above all other elements, whether your business performed as best as can be expected in those dark moments. That way you can be sure you retain loyal customers, protect your reputation and brand in spite of external events.

CrisisComms has been designed to provide a fast and simple method for communicating with customers via the essential item everyone carries with them – their mobile phone. Travel companies using CrisisComms have the advantage of protecting their reputation and business with an adaptive and scalable travel communications solution or service. Contact us and experience it for yourselves.

Jackie Groves for D-Flo November 2017