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travel technologies

10 THINGS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER
WHEN YOU LOOK FOR A TRAVEL BOOKING ENGINE

THE PROBLEM:

WITH SO MANY DIFFERENT TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS ON THE MARKET, HOW CAN TRAVEL COMPANIES DECIDE WHICH IS RIGHT FOR THEM?

We know today's travel industry is complex. With networks and partnerships established in disparate regions across the globe, it can be difficult to coordinate sales efforts, particularly due to the need for integrated, multi-functional software solutions with common access points. Travel companies have a wide variety of these solutions to choose from, especially when it comes to selecting the right booking engines for a given company's needs and desires. As such, these travel companies have to consider a number of different elements when selecting a technology partner based on specific criteria and desires.

But all this choice, while a positive thing for travel companies, begs the question: How do you choose the right software your travel business? How do you most effectively analyze your criteria and needs to ensure the software you select brings the greatest value to your business? And how can you tell which IT provider will be with you for the long haul and which will disappear after simply making the sale?

These are just some of the questions you face when evaluating technology solutions to business problems. After 14 years of experience in travel technology, we at dcs plus know that this kind of decision can be crucial for your business, and we also understand the importance of information and education when it comes to making technology-based decisions.

THE SOLUTION? WE HAVE SOME SUGGESTIONS.

#1. RECOMMENDATIONS

First thing you should ask yourself when you are evaluating a travel booking system is: Who would be the right person to recommend a booking system? One of the best sources for this feedback is the person you are buying the content from: the main purpose of the wholesalers or GDS's is to sell more and preserve their customers. Based on this concept, they will recommend the systems that ensure connections with as few errors as possible for maximum customer satisfaction.

#2. RELIABLE PRODUCT

Reliability is a must; we all know that, especially in today's global travel industry where customers have a wealth of booking options. As such, one question you must ask is: Are there any players that have been using the system for a relevant amount of time? Do they have a successful business? Are they satisfied with the functionality, ease, and effectiveness of the software? Or, on the flip side, what concerns or qualms do they have about the software? What do they wish the software could accomplish that it currently can not? If there are growing companies that have been using the system for more than two or three years, it means that there is a reason they keep using it.

#3. MULTIPLE OPTIONS FOR MAPPING/MATCHING

Mapping is a significant pain-point in the travel industry. Every travel company reaches a point when it needs to work with multiple suppliers. When this happens, you must have the proper mapping tools, and if the supplier can offer efficient mapping services, all the better. There are companies which focus on offering lots of destinations with good prices, but that in turn pay less attention to the quality of the content. Other companies pay a special degree of attention to the mapping process – especially the ones which are focusing on several destinations. In the second case, companies need the proper tools to differentiate and perform mapping per their extensive knowledge of the destinations. A high-quality, dynamic content platform (unique hotels, unique destinations) means investment in the system trust capital, and today's customers are more likely to trust this kind of look.

#4. CONNECTIONS/AGGREGATION

You need to pay close attention to the depth of the integration with the suppliers connected into the aggregation system. Many systems advertise hundreds of available connected suppliers, but usually these connections are just search and display. For a real business environment in which you deal with 50 or more transactions a day, you need a lot more than just search and display capability. Capabilities like automated processes, available and on request reservations, automated penalties, auto cancellations, self-management, self-services, error correction and handling, and alerting engines are critical elements to an aggregation system. For example, you can have 100 connected suppliers, however, if the the integration is just as the display result level, the value proposition for this technology is not where it needs to be for optimal success.

#5. INTERFACE

Let's face it: Appearances matter and the look and feel of interface needs to be comfortable and easy to use for agents. The buttons should be where your agents would expect them to be. Functionality should be intuitive. The interface should be simple enough for those without significant software experience to master. Just imagine what happens if you look at booking system with the filters positioned on the right side. Our experience says not everything that is initially innovative is necessarily good. Some things should be left as they are. This is also connected with the feedback you have from the agents who are already using the system.

#6. RESELLERS MANAGEMENT

If you plan to open a B2B resellers network, you should inquire about the resellers management: is there a way in which you can segment resellers? This might not be something you require it in the beginning when you're working with a small number of resellers, but it's definitely an important point to consider as your network grows and expands. At that point, bulk management tools like commission or mark-up per market or group of resellers is a key driver. Other tools like access rights, policies, suppliers' access, credit rules and automated cancellations might also help in managing a big network. If you plan to go big, ask about the reseller management tools.

#7. QUICK OFFERING TOOLS

Your resellers or travel agents need to optimize their time. The days when an agent had two hours to prepare an offer are long gone. Nowadays, if it takes more than five minutes to send an offer, the agent is not working as efficiently as possible. Ask your software provider if the travel agent can send the offer via e-mail, directly from the search process. If, for example, you can combine multiple hotels for example in an offer and send it to the customer together with the prices fast, you have a better chance of closing the deal. Remember: Success in today's travel industry is all about speed and agility.

#8. ERROR CONTROL

Errors do happen - that's part of life. But errors are especially problematic when you are working with dynamic content. When two or more machines communicate over the internet, there are drop-offs or mismatches in the databases which lead to errors. If you have proper error control tools in the system, the damage can be minimized. Your system needs to be smart enough to handle those errors (or put you at the steering wheel when needed) in such a way that your buyers do not feel the issue. Afterall, you are the seller, and for the frustrated buyer it does not matter that you are experiencing issues with your sources. So, ask your oftware provider what happens when an error occur? How does this system respond? What functionalities are in place to correct these errors? Better yet: ask current system users about error rates with that system and the fail-safes in place to correct these errors.

#9. SUPPORT TEAM

When you have a problem or a question, you need to know where and when to call. A support team that has the knowledge to give you quick and accurate answers is a must. Ask other companies using the software what their relationship is with the provider's support team.Inquire about the speed, reliability, and overall usefulness of a company's support network? Are they there for you when you need them? What resources do they have at-the-ready to troubleshoot issues? How effective are their solutions to issues? You'll figure out right away if you can rely on their help or not.

#10. RELIABLE COMPANY

Look for a company with a good history and a good name in the field. Investigate and research the company's track record to see if the company is stable and what manner of investment backbone the company maintains. The investment in an enterprise level software solution could be a big one, especially if you are looking for an end-to-end solution where much of your business will rely on stability. The partnership with your tech partner could   potentially be a long one, so it's important to make sure you can work successfully with them. Pay them a visit, see their offices, meet the employees, and get to know them. Make sure that the company you choose as your technology partner will be at your side now and for years to come.

SO, WHAT'S THE POINT? WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Hopefully, this guide has been helpful in realizing the questions, concerns, and issues you need to address when choosing a technology partner - particularly when it comes to finding the right booking engine platform. But remember: Before you dive in, the very first step in the process is analyzing the needs of your business. This is a very crucial step, albeit one often missed, and it's crucial to visualize your first, second, and third-tier needs based on the makeup of your business. With all the time, money, and resources invested in selecting a technology partner, it's not a decision that should be made lightly. For this reason, you have to do your homework to discover which partner will be the best fit for your team, company, and project. You have to be willing to ask questions, get references and referrals, and take the time to consider the compatibility of teams. Be open and receptive to the things different companies have to offer and align those with the things you are looking for.

It may seem like a lot of work, but taking the time to find the right technology partner will pay dividends in the short, mid, and long-term and could result in new and interesting partnerships, collaborations, and opportunities.

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