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JET STREAM

A conversation with Wolfgang Prock-Schauer, the chief executive officer of Jet Airways.



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TRAVELER OF THE FUTURE

Several new technologies are emerging that have the potential to dramatically affect the travel experience.

■ By Tony Brice | *Ascend* Contributor

"The future is already here," science fiction writer William Gibson said. "It's just not very evenly distributed." Gibson could have easily been referring to travel in the year 2007. As new technologies emerge, a few "early adopter" travelers are already taking a glance into the future.

From the moment the idea of taking a trip is first conceived through the return home, there are opportunities to experience all things travel related in ways never before imagined. Whether travelers are anticipating a week or two away from work or dreading an 18-hour flight in seat 35E on an airplane chock full of passengers, there are many new technologies that are here to help. Because it takes time for any new, different technology to become widely adopted, usage of all of them isn't necessarily widespread ... yet. But there are several more promising ones.

Where to go? What to do? What to expect?

For much of the last century, our expectations regarding a trip were created largely by the friend or family member who shared stories, photos or video of their own trip;

or the "been everywhere, done everything" professional travel agent who sold it to you; or something on television or in print — from documentaries such as those produced by National Geographic to slick ads from a leading travel supplier.

The growing ability for anyone in the world to publish photos, travel journals and opinions regarding travel experiences is effecting profound change. In this century, it is increasingly likely that the very idea of taking a trip is the result of a discovery on the Internet — something that creates an emotional connection. It might have been a photo of the sun setting behind an over-the-water villa at a resort on Tahiti by a young couple on their honeymoon. Maybe it was a 20-second video of the Amalfi Coast in Italy as seen from the deck of a passing cruise ship. Or quite possibly inspiration developed from a description in someone's blog of having awoken on a barge in the middle of the springtime tulip fields in Holland.

Regardless of what motivated the traveler to begin dreaming of a particular trip, the chance is increasing that, somewhere along the way, the traveler has placed some of his

or her trust in the kindness, cameras or keyboards of total strangers.

New Approaches to Shopping

Once travelers have ideas about where they'd like to go, the way they shop for travel is changing as well. Perhaps the biggest change of all is how travelers interact with suppliers and online travel agencies.

For the most part, early Web sites simply took offline processes and capabilities and delivered them online. As a result, other than graphical interfaces to make travel shopping easier for the average person, shopping for travel on the Web consists primarily of looking at the same price-ordered options viewed by traditional travel agents via their respective global distribution systems. This was the old way — the next wave, "continuous shopping," is here.

A couple of years ago, there was an entertaining commercial from a popular online travel agency. In it, an exhausted father surfed Web sites for a better price, presumably for hours or days on end, while his family sat watching television in the next room. When he found a price worth getting excited about,

he blasted an air horn and the family dropped what they were doing and rushed to look at the computer.

Now, travelers can download Southwest Airlines' DING!® and several other notification facilities to tell them what they want to know, when they need to know it. Given the fact that the number of seats available at the lowest price is limited, time is of the essence. While notification may not be used as much by business travelers, it provides a great opportunity for leisure travelers to know when great deals are offered and give them the best chance at reserving a seat at the best price. Early implementations of notification technology are limited to airfares, but it's only a matter of time before travel packages, cruises, and other travel

all in one place. This custom "search space" could then become their primary source for information on a trip they want to take.

Technically speaking, there are few barriers to integrating the aggregation of RSS feeds and notification capabilities. Initial RSS feeds have been designed to provide a very simple means of delivering marketing messages — often containing little more than a title, links and descriptions. The goal has been to entice the traveler back to the supplier's site. In the future, the content in RSS feeds will start to become more standard and, as a result, RSS readers will be able to understand and act on the content. Possible actions may include the detection of price reductions, additional services or new traveler reviews that could also trigger notifications to the traveler.

cases, Wi-Fi and/or smartphones are the common thread.

One of the best examples of mobile software to help travelers is Loki, a product from Boston-based Skyhook Wireless. Loki (loki.com) describes it as location-based search and "virtual GPS." What it actually does is identify where a traveler is at any given time by leveraging its awareness of Wi-Fi access points. Once it has determined a traveler's location, the traveler can open Loki channels organized around categories such as dining, entertainment and weather to enhance the Internet experience. More specifically, a traveler who has just arrived at his or her destination can immediately look at options for having dinner, seeing a movie at a conveniently located theater or reading tomorrow's weather forecast.



Photo by Phil Datey/Shutterstock.com

Through the use of personal digital assistants, laptop computers and cell phones, airlines can easily communicate with their customers in many ways including advising about flight changes and upcoming travel promotions.



Photo by Phil Datey/Shutterstock.com

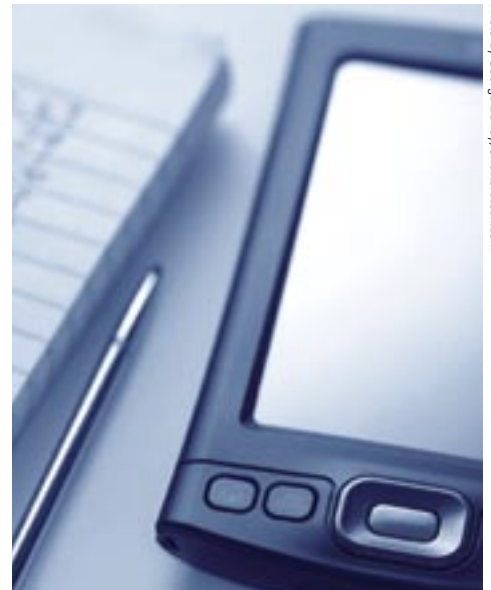


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products are offered in the same manner.

One reason many travelers have not yet taken advantage of notification capabilities is that they spend so much time away from their computers. It's highly likely, though, that they have a mobile phone. The tremendous growth in the penetration of smartphones in markets around the world will go a long way toward addressing this problem. With smartphones such as Microsoft Windows Mobile® devices, travelers will expect to take advantage of any capabilities on their desktop or laptop while on the move. It will be critical, however, that suppliers (or aggregators) not abuse the notification privilege afforded to them by their customers — if they do, customers will begin ignoring the alerts or disable them altogether.

In instances where immediate notification isn't necessary, travelers will find new uses for really simple syndication. By subscribing to and organizing RSS feeds that are highly relevant to the trip the traveler wants to take, they'll be able to gather their current travel options

On the other end of the shopping content spectrum, it will be all about marketing for some travel suppliers as rich user interfaces become the norm rather than the exception. Web sites associated with destinations where unique experiences can be expected are already making significant investments in content that is entertaining and absorbing. Las Vegas, Nevada, is one such destination, and the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino Web site (mgmgrand.com) provides a great glimpse into the future of these types of sites.

Making Connections

Looking back a few years from now, it's possible that wireless connectivity will be viewed as having had the most profound effect on traveler behavior. As evidenced by the proliferation of wireless Internet connectivity in airports, hotel rooms and on airplanes, user demand is obviously already there. There is also a new generation of software that is starting to appear, that takes advantage of people's desire to be connected at all times for a variety of purposes. In many

Some of the best examples of wireless-based capabilities include mobile social software. One small company providing innovative capabilities is Jambo™ Networks (jambo.net). Some start-up companies, such as Loki, are primarily focusing their location-based services on helping people find things. Jambo Networks, however, has focused its efforts on helping people find other people, specifically those in one or more of their social networks.

For travelers willing to register the fact they belong to a social network such as MySpace, LinkedIn or MyFamily, Jambo Networks will alert them when there are people in those networks who are physically close by. They can then use instant messaging or call them to establish face-to-face contact. In addition to the long list of social networks it supports, the company has expanded its capabilities. It now also includes the ability to detect the proximity of users with affiliations such as schools/universities, conferences, civic organizations, companies and politics/activist groups. Ultimately, proximity alerts can be created where



Photo by Lincoln Rogers/Shutterstock.com



Tomorrow's travelers are likely to have access to an array of electronic devices — smartphones, iPods, laptops, PDAs — that help them achieve a seamless, enjoyable, stress-free travel experience.

any interest is shared by two or more users of Jambo Networks.

Staying Entertained

Despite the joy of experiencing new places and cultures, travel also comes with occasional angst. The causes can range from the boredom of a long flight or hours waiting to make a connection to simply wanting to be in touch with people and events back home during long periods away.

Once again, technology is coming to the rescue, primarily in the form of Internet-based capabilities. The most obvious is the combination of mobile devices and massive amounts of affordable storage. It seems like only a couple of years ago that the maximum storage on an Apple iPod was five gigabytes and could only hold about 1,000 songs. The fifth-generation iPod, however, came

with a maximum of 80GB of storage. Furthermore, Apple's iTunes store now has movies, television shows, podcasts and games in addition to music. Portable media players are nothing new, but there appears to be no end in sight to how much content travelers will eventually be able to take with them.

Relatively new and still lightly used is the ability to retransmit live television. As mobile devices and Wi-Fi access points continue to proliferate, San Mateo, California-based Sling Media has a family of products, Slingbox, that are extremely well positioned to soar in popularity. The devices are getting rave reviews from early adopters who use the Slingbox to capture television programming in their local market and redirect it as streaming video anywhere in the world. In general, all that's required is a digital source at home (cable, satellite dish, DVR) and a broadband Internet connection

from a personal computer, Apple Mac or Windows Mobile device. People living away from home for extended periods of time will benefit from the technology as much as, if not more than, travelers.

Anyone who has ever tried to predict the future knows what a tricky proposition it can be. All of the capabilities described above, though, are available today. So, the real question is whether they will achieve wide adoption or go the way of New Coke. Of course, only time will tell. But, in the meantime, many travelers will have fun waiting for the answer. **F**

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+count it up

340+

The number of satellites put into orbit by Boeing launch vehicles that will pass overhead in the next 24 hours.

25

The percentage the International Air Transport Association board expects the airline accident rate to decrease by the end of 2008.

53 million

The amount in U.S. dollars of goods and services that Boeing will export in the next 24 hours to customers worldwide.