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Is the travel research faff half of the fun?



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At EyeforTravel last week, there was some debate about whether a quicker booking process might not make your customers happier. Senay Boztas reports

New travel companies trying to help the customer book a holiday in minutes could be missing the point.

According to Rod Cuthbert, former chairman of Viator and founder of [Rome2rio](#), an online travel planning and booking agency, spending weeks researching a family trip is half the fun.

"I'm constantly amused by technologists in the travel industry who want to shorten the search and discovery time for consumers," he told the [EyeforTravel Europe](#) summit in London last week. "It's a crucial part of the satisfaction, looking at hotels while they are sitting at their desk at work three weeks before their trip. They want it to take days, to look at a dozen sites. People don't want the answer in 300 milliseconds and they will avoid those products."

Cuthbert is sceptical about voice search-based artificially intelligent products that some believe will soon help you decide on your location, travel and hotel options, and booking in a few questions.

"If I'm a business person in London wanting to go to Manchester yet again and can talk to an assistant, that's fantastic," he added. "But if I'm taking the family on a three-week trip to Sicily, then I want to stretch out that search and discovery process."

“ A Dutch study found that the most consistently happy period was while holidaymakers were anticipating their break

A recent EyeforTravel [white paper](#) looked at companies like Trainline, Heathrow Airport and Edwardian hotels, which are exploring voice assistants to help their customers find faster answers. But if satisfaction is key, Cuthbert believes we should take note of a 2010 [Dutch study](#) investigating whether people who are going on holiday are significantly happier than non-holidaymakers: it found that the most consistently happy period was while they were anticipating their break.

The debate continues

But some major players in the travel industry disagree. Onno Zoeter, principal data scientist at [Booking.com](#), told the conference that his business wants to simplify the whole decision-making process around vacation booking. "If we look at how users book their trip, it's an emotional, stressful thing sometimes," he said. "The problem is larger than booking accommodation. Where are you going to go? Where will your family have a great time? [This] opportunity to help customers is a big problem that's not solved yet online."

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Onno Zoeter, Principal Data Scientist, Booking.com

One of the finalists in the 2018 EyeforTravel Start Up Awards believes we want to be able to book in a matter of minutes, via a 10-question approach.

"It has never been easier to book a flight but only if you know exactly what you want to do and pay," said Markus Bohl, co-founder of [Fineway](#). "But when you plan a trip you don't know these things. You spend two working days on searching, comparing, reading recommendations, and visiting 60 websites.

"We think this is a really tedious process. We made it our purpose to shorten this discovery phase and make it a better experience for customers. In the end, a journey of three months will become a journey of three minutes."

All the experts probably agree on one thing, though: however you book it, that holiday never feels long enough.

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