



5 WAYS TRAVEL BRANDS CAN MANAGE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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The travel industry is no stranger to major global disruptions, whether that means terrorism, wildfires, ash clouds, economic recessions, or the coronavirus pandemic. Yet the industry has rebounded each time, and will do so again.

During these trying situations, travelers continue to seek out a wide range of information and answers about issues such as cancellations and delays, updated policies and procedures, health and safety concerns, questions surrounding future travel plans, and payments and refunds. At the same time, employees are having to adapt to new remote working environments, technology tools, and an unprecedented influx of customer inquiries.

These times of uncertainty lend an opportunity for companies to stand out in how they respond to and engage with their customers and employees. As Lucinda McCaffrey, enterprise account executive and travel lead at Bold360 explained in an interview with SkiftX, “In terms of the coronavirus, it has forced the travel industry into a more modern way of thinking about customer and employee engagement that puts them on par with other industries.” McCaffrey also emphasized that “customer engagement matters even more than usual when the situation is highly emotive. And clearly, this is a very, very emotional time for everyone.”

Here are five actions steps travel brands can take to put a customer engagement strategy in place that can adapt with today's tenuous times.

1. Listen to your customers

Engaging with customers and employees is a two-way street. You're providing them with the information they need, yet by having the right technology tools in place, you're also able to listen to and learn from them. This is especially important when the world feels like it's changing every day at a speed that's challenging to keep up with, and the needs of customers and employees are shifting daily. Truly listening to customers allows travel brands to be more agile and quickly pivot to keep up with changing customer demands, McCaffrey explained. "In times of crisis you need to listen and deliver in real time."

2. Empower your employees

The emphasis on the need for social distancing right now means that frontline employees may not be working in the same physical space or with the same technology or resources that they're used to. However, they still must have the ability to access the latest information needed to assist customers.

They should also be enabled to work from anywhere as much as possible while still being able to deliver a high-quality experience. This means taking advantage of the advancements that have been made in video, screen-sharing, chat, and messaging tools. As McCaffrey explained, "A lot of companies, especially in travel, aren't yet equipped for this. We've had numerous instances of companies that have recently moved all of their agents from phone to digital channels that they can access at home, such as chatbots, online FAQs, and messaging tools. These tools don't require any specific hardware other than a laptop or iPad, and perhaps a short video to onboard them to the technology."

3. Assess your customer engagement tools

It's imperative that travel brands take time to evaluate what customer engagement tools and platforms they already have in place and which ones are needed to best reach and assist their customers during this pivotal moment. Tools that cut down on communication friction, such as live chat, messaging, and conversational bots, should be implemented on your brand's website and/or mobile app to enable

real-time engagement, handle increased inquiry volume, and manage both simple and more complex questions from customers.

Examining how sectors outside of travel are using new customer engagement tools can be useful as well. Many companies in the technology, e-commerce, consumer packaged goods, and healthcare industries are currently leading customer response to the pandemic. Looking at how these sectors are putting future-proof tactics in place can help travel brands answer today's challenges and prepare for those yet to come.

4. Enable self-service capabilities

Customers are facing a lot of confusion right now and are likely flocking to your brand with a greater volume of questions and concerns than ever before. Technologies such as dynamic search bars and chatbots are going to play a major role in how brands engage with customers. Such tools — especially those powered by artificial intelligence that get smarter as they go — can empower customers to find what they need on their own. This not only lessens the burden on brands and their employees that may be operating with leaner resources than usual, but also allows customers to help themselves in a timely, straightforward manner. “Enabling AI-powered digital touchpoints such as support centers, FAQs, and chat bots means that your customers don’t have to go very far to find the relevant information that they need,” said McCaffrey.

5. Optimize and centralize your knowledge base

This applies to both employees and customers. In order to relieve the uptick in customer inquiries, customers need to know where to go to consistently find the answers they need. This could mean making it easier to find self-service tools, FAQ pages, and updated policies and procedures for customers, and providing consistent information across channels for remote workers and for specific needs based on geography for employees.

Brands should ensure that they’re analyzing user behavior and customer data to monitor how customers and employees are engaging with content and tools as well. This can illustrate what types of tools and content are and aren’t serving actual needs and where there may be gaps in information and operations. As McCaffrey explained, “The brands with access to both qualitative and quantitative data from the right digital touchpoints will be able to pivot in real time as things change. For example, a piece of data can show how frequently a single question is being asked, allowing the brand to automate the answer going forward and alleviating employees from the responsibility of answering manually.”

No matter what type of crisis the travel industry is facing, customers will undoubtedly continue to seek out information and answers to help them traverse through uncertain landscapes. Those travel brands that are best equipped to meet new challenges as they emerge and evolve — and support their customers in a clear, straightforward, and empathetic way — will be the ones more likely to weather today's storm.

Bold360 allows companies to support every customer in the channel of their choice – live chat, conversational messaging, email, SMS, and social platforms. From AI-powered self-service that drives improved operational efficiency and faster resolutions to personalized engagements with human agents that builds deeper customer relationships, Bold360 offers the best of AI and agent technology in one solution.

To find out more about how you can empower both your employees and customers during this pivotal moment in time, [click here](#).

