



Web automation:

The future of direct booking on Metasearch

Direct booking is here. It improves the user experience, it's what consumers and airlines want and it increases Metasearch revenues. But traditional approaches are limited and slow coming. Web automation technology provides a better and more expedient gateway to direct booking on Metasearch.

The future is now

There's clear determination for Metasearch companies to own more than the search and discovery portion of the online travel experience.

“The time has come to offer a fresh form of direct booking in metasearch.”¹
— Gareth Williams, CEO, Skyscanner

The power of Metasearch is in the title. Engaging price-sensitive travelers and offering real value through search – before forwarding them to the best deal on an OTA or supplier and collecting the commission. The clear next step – assuming it's viable – would be to close the loop and have the traveller book directly on their property. We know consumers are right behind this.² They want to book price-sensitive products, and they're particularly inclined towards doing so on mobile. We also know that airlines see this as the future of air ticketing.³

In a limited way direct booking is a current reality. The industry has been met with somewhat more economical alternatives to expensive, traditional distribution systems⁴ that would otherwise eat away the Metasearch best price proposition. While these technologies have gained limited traction their adoption is held-back because supplier take-up is limited⁵ and integration is fragmented and complex.

¹ <https://partners.skyscanner.net/future-of-airline-distribution/>

² “We're committed to continue offering people choices where to book, but we know some people would prefer to complete their purchases without leaving KAYAK.” – <https://www.kayak.com/news/choice-now-can-book-hotels-without-leaving-kayak/>

³ <https://skift.com/2017/03/17/lufthansa-calls-direct-booking-a-success-as-british-airways-is-poised-to-copy-it/>

⁴ <https://www.iata.org/whatwedo/airline-distribution/ndc/Documents/ndc-standard-presentation.pdf>

⁵ Of the 274 Current Airline Members of IATA, 37 (14%) are currently active on NDC. See <http://www.iata.org/whatwedo/airline-distribution/ndc/Pages/registry.aspx> and <http://www.iata.org/about/members/Pages/airline-list.aspx?All=true>

Beyond the traditional stable of distribution companies, Metasearch has another alternative with extremely broad coverage that's available right now: direct booking via the transactional automation of supplier websites.⁶ We believe the natural next step for direct booking on Metasearch is a single API for direct booking at scale which has whole-of-market and full ancillary coverage.

Booking flows – especially on mobile – are broken

User experience is king. Today the most successful travel booking experiences can really only be enjoyed on a full-size computer. And it's no surprise that this isn't where most consumers spend their time researching and considering their travel purchases.⁷

Consumers can be considered to be highly trained researchers. 59% of holidaymakers say they compare prices online and that price is the primary driver in the decision-making process.⁸ And much of this research occurs on a smartphone screen. While this search > compare > search behaviour is fragmented the booking experience is worse still. Only 20% of travellers who carried out research on their smartphone also used the device to book.⁹ Booking on mobile is broken.

Customers want the best price and pain-free booking, regardless of the device they're using.

Controlling the full funnel is crucial

Metasearch by nature is purely online and their search experience is a finely tuned and tested user experience. But the leap away to the supplier to purchase is a significant contributor to poor customer experience and churn.¹⁰

Applying design expertise to the full funnel – so the entire transaction occurs on the Metasearch property – is the logical step. Delivering an experience for mobile, where onboarding is simplified and return visitors need only tap a few times to purchase will be a crucial differentiator.¹¹

“The shopping experience has to be great so they can find what they need straight away, followed by a frictionless buying process. On mobile, this is fundamentally harder, so take out anything that is hindering you from getting to that point of booking.”¹²

— Adam Jay, SVP of Product and Global Marketing Channels, Hotels.com

⁶ <https://about.ub.io/#/travel>

⁷ <https://www.kayak.co.uk/news/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/05/Mobile-Travel-Report-2016-UK.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.kayak.co.uk/news/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/05/Mobile-Travel-Report-2016-UK.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.kayak.co.uk/news/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/05/Mobile-Travel-Report-2016-UK.pdf>

¹⁰ “No well-run airline or third-party retailer wants unnecessary obstacles to exist between a customer and the products they want to buy”

<https://www.iata.org/whatwedo/airline-distribution/ndc/Documents/ndc-future-airline-distribution-report.pdf>

¹¹ <https://skift.com/2017/02/09/airfare-comparison-websites-are-slow-to-grapple-instant-booking-kayak-skyscanner-momondo-tripadvisor/>

¹² http://www.eyefortravel.com/sites/default/files/travel_mobile_ota_and_metasearch.pdf

Controlling the full funnel reduces the appeal to continue researching and holds the consumer on-property, providing fewer reasons to back-out of the buying decision. Near instant purchase – tap, tap done – amplifies this advantage.

Controlling the full funnel provides broader advantages too. Customer behaviour across the complete flow – from discovery to purchase – is easily exploited for its valuable customer insights. These are vital to teams already working to optimise on-site behaviour. End-to-end data capture, and the possibility of saving user profiles are opened-up by direct booking.¹³

Conversion follows the experience

Owning the funnel, providing an optimal experience on all platforms and keeping customers engaged all adds up to one thing: Better conversion.

“The average traveler is more likely to buy if they can purchase a plane ticket or related service while staying on the price-comparison sites”¹⁴
– Sean O’Neill, Skift

It’s crucial, too, that attribution and current revenue lines remain intact, so with conversion improvements comes steady and improved income.

Enter web automation

Reflecting again on current trends towards direct booking we can paint the following picture: The technologies from the traditional distribution companies deploy models that require deep integrations with suppliers. For that reason they come with a particular limitation. Because the integrations are so heavy, supplier uptake is glacial. Of the 274 Current Airline Members of IATA, 37 – just 14% – are currently active on NDC.¹⁵

Further, the experience Metasearch companies have of integrating these technologies is equally painful. Despite apparent standards, different suppliers require unique integrations. Travel booking is necessarily complex given the ticketing permutations and available ancillaries. Supplier specificity and platform fragmentation is inevitable with each supplier working on its own direct booking implementation.

Conversely web automation, where a system is trained to mimic human interaction on supplier websites, obviates the coverage problem. This approach can book, check prices, even check-in, getting the job done as reliably, and gaining supplier coverage much more quickly, than supplier-dependent approaches.

¹³ <http://www.travolution.com/articles/102415/guest-post-win-the-data-war-to-unleash-the-power-of-personalisation>

¹⁴ <https://skift.com/2017/02/09/airfare-comparison-websites-are-slow-to-grapple-instant-booking-kayak-skyscanner-momondo-tripadvisor/>

¹⁵ <http://www.iata.org/whatwedo/airline-distribution/ndc/Pages/registry.aspx> and <http://www.iata.org/about/members/Pages/airline-list.aspx?All=true>

Web automation is by far the quickest route to at-scale direct booking. It enforces affiliate attribution and solves the cookie sandbox issue – where a user starts booking on mobile and leaps onto their laptop – so customer acquisition efforts aren't squandered and income is guaranteed.

One enterprise-grade API for direct booking

Approaching the challenge of direct booking for Metasearch by means of transactional web automation brings the advantage of a single, enterprise-grade API for direct travel booking, with extremely broad supplier and ancillary coverage.

“ubio’s core technology is the Automation Cloud, a system that can interact with and transact on any supplier – saving the user the pain of booking manually and allowing for a pitch-perfect user experience on any Metasearch site.”

— Marcus Greenwood, CEO, ubio.

And supplier coverage is not limited by application. Web automation can work across air and ground ticketing, hotel booking, car rental and also intangibles like insurance. Ultimately packages can be booked with one buying action across disparate suppliers, the system traversing each one in the Automation Cloud to combine the perfect package. One customer + flight + hotel + car + insurance. One tap. Booked.

With such broad coverage Metasearch companies can meaningfully put themselves in command of the full, end-to-end booking experience, building out a flow that answers to the needs of today’s traveller-researchers on mobile or any platform. And they can take advantage of full-funnel insights and possess a complete picture of their users so they book again.

This light-touch means of achieving direct booking through automation is as robust as traditional distribution systems, vastly more economical and delivers real conversion increases.

ubio’s web automation is ready to get booking.



Find out more about ubio services for travel at <http://ub.io>