The Travel Tech Show at **WTM**

Paul Richer, Senior Partner of Genesys – The Travel Technology Consultancy, considers the 'digital nowness' society that we live in and showcases the high tech highlights of WTM 2015.

Like so many industries, travel has been increasingly adopting technology to power its business. If you think back to pre-internet days, all businesses that traded geographically distant products relied on specialists that had connections in far afield places to bring-in the products and put them on sale. Commodities such as precious stones, coffee, cloths and speciality foods, for example, relied on importers who conducted their business over the telephone and latterly via telex and then fax.

Travel was in fact no different. It relied on personal relationships between product providers such as hoteliers, destination management companies and travel companies to do the deals that would bring products to geographically distant markets.

Major travel exhibitions such as World Travel Market had an important role to play in the industry, bringing together buyers and sellers to meet, discuss, negotiate and contract. Travel being an exciting, charismatic product attracted adventurous and sociable types who enjoyed WTM as an opportunity to get together with their peers.

Well, nothing seems to have changed. WTM still buzzes with activity as friends from far afield meet at the exhibition to do business, to agree a few deals and to socialise. Travel is a people industry and a walk around the exhibition floor at WTM London makes this very evident.

At first sight, WTM may look the same as always but it has actually changed quite significantly. Travel has become a high tech industry. WTM London reflected this when it launched The Travel Tech Show at WTM five years ago.

Why is travel high tech? The answer lies in the very nature of the products we sell. Unlike coffee, cloths and other commodities, travel does not exist when it is sold. It is an information product at the point of sale. Pre-tech days when a booking was made it would have been a note in a diary or an entry on a wall chart. Nowadays, we are in the 'Information Age' and it is much more likely that contracts and bookings will be records within a computer system database.

We are also in the 'Internet Age'. The geographic barriers of old that allowed importers and traders to add value by bringing products to distant markets have largely been broken down. Communication tools such as e-mail &

WhatsApp, free voice services such as Skype and Viber have shrunk the world. There are no cost or time implications to communicating with a product provider whether they are in the next town or half way around the world. Moreover, the web has provided a global shop window for every business to offer its products across the world.

A more recent explosion in technology has seen the widespread adoption by consumers of smartphones and tablets. eMarketer estimates that there will be over two billion smartphones in use across the world by 2016 with Ericsson estimating 6.1 billion smartphones in use globally by 2020 (compared to a world population estimated at 7.7 billion).

As consumers use their smartphones more and more, as they get used to shopping on their handsets, they are becoming increasingly at ease with making high value purchases online. The reticence of old at spending hundreds or thousands of pounds on one's smartphone is shrinking away. Consumers are happy to search for travel, discuss their travel plans with their peers and book and pay online. In fact, Generation Z – the Millennials born after the year 2000, prefer to shop this way. They have not known a time when the world was not at their fingertips. They are sociable online, happy to share information about themselves that an older generation would deem intrusive and, importantly, they are part of the 'Now Society'. They are not prepared to wait to research and book travel (or do anything else). Should they want to transact, they want to do it now.

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Travel is a tech-driven industry. If you are going to compete, you need to understand what technology is out there and how you can use it. Take time to walk around the exhibitors at The Travel Tech Show at WTM, then come along to one or more of my Genesys Sessions. Perhaps see you there!

For info on the Travel Tech Show visit www.wtmlondon.com More from Genesys at www.genesys.net

The importance of this new and growing age of 'digital nowness' is reflected in how The Travel Tech Show at WTM has grown in size to become a major 'show within a show' feature. It has doubled in size since its launch and will feature 110 exhibitors this year who will be visited by close on 10,000 attendees.

The technologies now on offer are wide-ranging. Gone are the days when technology exhibitors were just the GDSs and a few travel system suppliers. Every aspect of the travel industry is now covered, from business to business applications such as the channel managers that distribute hotel products to technology that analyses the social sentiment being put online by your customers.

Technology in travel encompasses all aspects of your business whether it is powering the 'factory' processes to drive improvements in business efficiency or whether it is used for competitive advantage, helping you reach the market more effectively than your competitors. Exhibitors displaying at The Travel Tech Show at WTM will be covering both these facets of technology.

I have also organised some technology related seminars that I call the Genesys Sessions. These take place on the Tuesday and are, of course, free to attend. They feature top-notch presenters.

The subjects covered at WTM London 2015:

- **Customers Crave Content**
  It is vital that your online content presents your products in the best and most compelling way.
- **Search Engine Update 2015**
  Speakers from Google, Yahoo! and Baidu International will give us the