Travel Smart

Personalising Vacation Content

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A long history

Since the days of the stage-coaches of the early 1800s, to Thomas Cook in the late 19th Century, packaged travel has not altered much: the tourist pays the tour company for a package of transport, accommodation, and various activities, while the business does the work of pulling these different products together into a organised experience for customers. Travel agents, either internal to the operator or outside, sell these packaged holidays to potential vacationers, and receive recompense from the sale in terms of commission. In this way, travel agents act, in effect, as a sales force for tour operators and their products.

Dynamic packaging of local experiences was never previously a reality

All those years ago, and in the centuries since, **dynamic packaging never really caught on** for tours and activities, **due to the complexity** of the arrangements. You needed a **talent for planning, experience and local connections** to design a packaged tour that flows seamlessly end-to-end. **Anything more complicated than an activity that lasts a few hours** is difficult for travellers to plan themselves, so for **over 100 years it has remained the realm of travel agents** as trustworthy middle-men in the booking process. **According to a recent report from Skift, the global tours and activities sector turns over $150B annually and is growing 9% a year over the coming years. 80% of this business is still conducted offline.**

Today, personalisation is not just desirable. It's essential.

However, times are changing. **Today, holidaymakers** increasingly **crave experiences** that **engage** them with their **destination** and the **local people**. **Not as groups on schedules suffering** the crush of **over-tourism,** but as **individuals** enjoying **freedom** and **flexibility**. Technology has made this possible and the increases in sales of activities as recorded by Viator, Tripadvisor and the like prove this is the case with growth levels sometimes over 100% annually.
As any **savvy retailer** will tell you, **personalisation** is the **new frontier**. Online or offline, it doesn't matter. It's essential and it should be **should be the Holy Grail** for travel providers too.

Mass-production.
The lame horse.

It's **easy to understand** why vacationers feel this way. At **home** they already have the **expectation of personalised service** throughout their daily lives, so on **holiday it's natural** that they will want the same. They'll **shun products** that **over-organise**, and instead turn to travel options that **closely synchronise** with their **specific ambitions and needs.**

Brand loyalty is challenged

Travellers are **less brand loyal** than they used to be and their **willingness to compromise is low**. Their **expectations** on the other hand **are high**. This combination moves them to take **counsel from peer reviews** and do **online research** to seek out **multiple providers** to patch together their own vacations. It's **not about cost**, they are doing it in the belief they can **more flexibly control their own experiences** than by travelling on a package.

Online 'experience' portals are cashing in
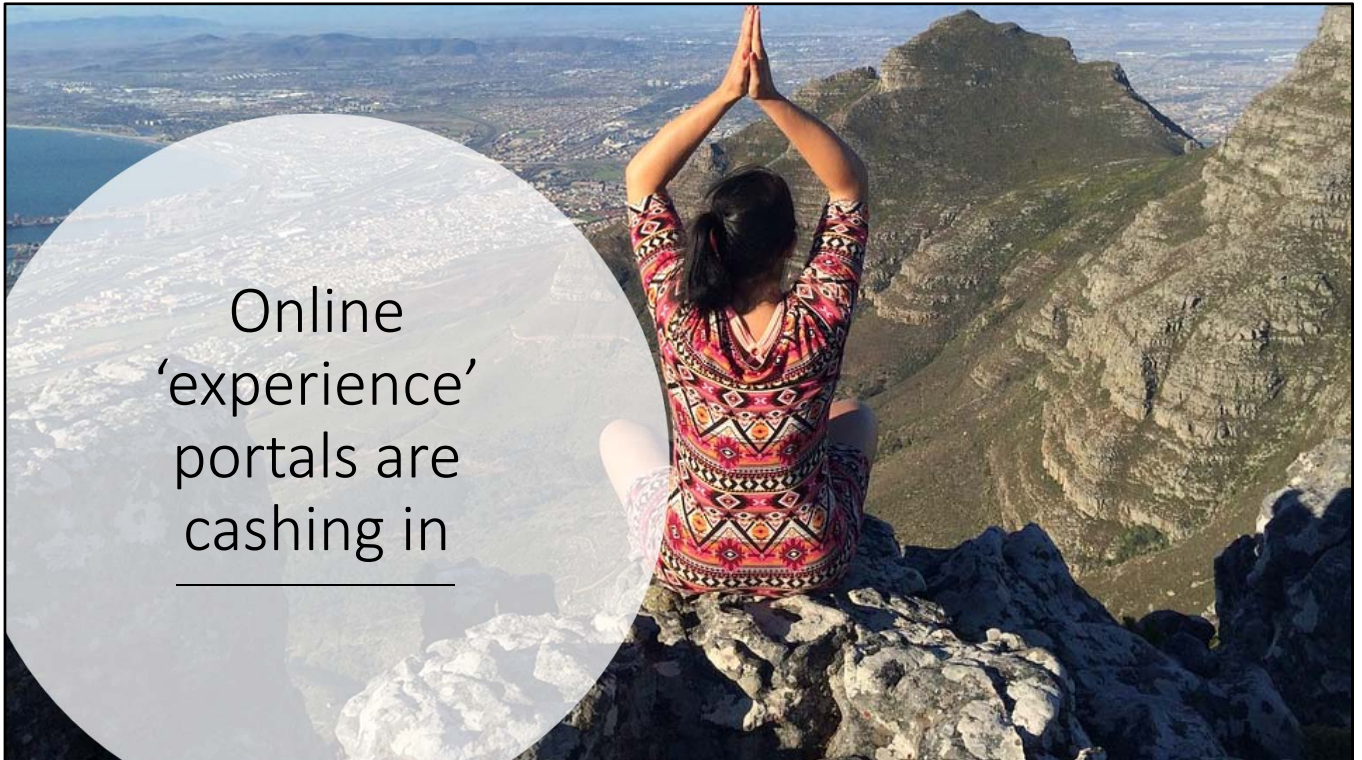
This **transition** is being **fuelled** by the relentless rise of **online 'experience' portals**, which roll out their **virtual red carpets** to anyone and everyone. Today, there is **bookable access** to almost **unlimited longtail services**: from personal yoga classes on Table Mountain to an al fresco lunch with a yachtsman on his ketch in Antibes.

The Nero Syndrome

They say that **Nero fiddled** while Rome burned. The **tourism equivalent** today is that companies set about **tweaking products** to provide **personalisation** and **choice** – but these '**local flirtations**' and '**authentic experiences**' may **ultimately fail to inspire or deliver**. Customers **see past the smoke and mirrors** and know they are still **locked into group** movements and **pre-set schedules** with precious **little real free time**.

Transforming our business
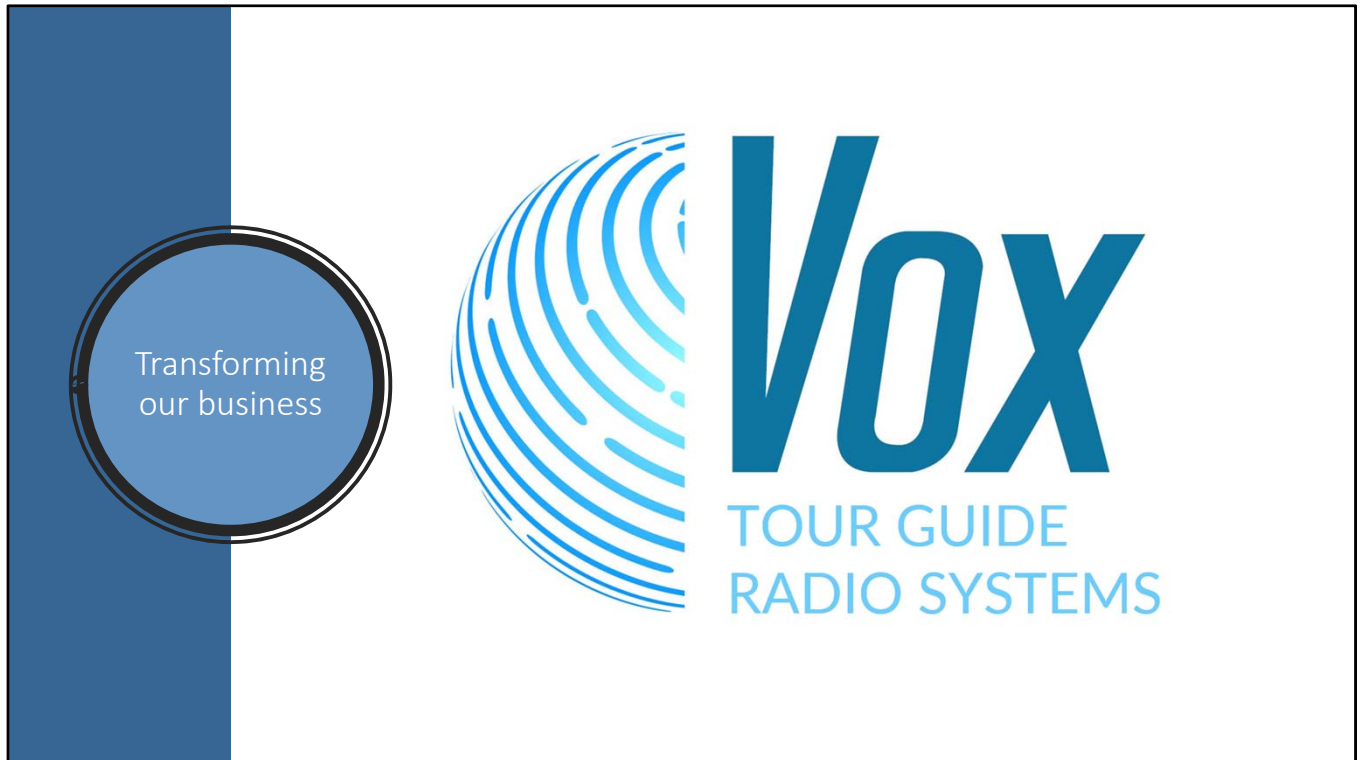
So, what have <u>we</u> done in <u>our</u> business to address the trend to personalisation and put ourselves in a strong position from which we can help our B2B partners grow in this brave new world? Well, the **Vox journey began back in 2001** with tour-guide radio-systems. Today, we are the world-leader with over **50 offices** involved in global logistics and we handle audio services for **8 million tourists** a year through **3,500 tour and cruise operator partners.**

**Vox Mundi
Case Study**

Technology & Tourism

I'll tell you more about our current portfolio and approach later but first let's look at Vox Mundi as a case study. Following a major success with Vox audio systems in the Basilica of St Francis at Assisi, in 2007 we formed Vox Mundi, and we became the **exclusive licensee of St. Peter's Basilica** for the provision of visitor services (i.e. visitor flow management, guided tours, audio guides, etc) **Today we handle a staggering 3.5 million visitors** to St Peter's every single year. Vox Mundi was the springboard for our expansion…

2007 to 2014

Between **2007 to 2014 our core business at the Basilica was operating traditional tour guide systems**, long and short-term rental for groups using **analogue radio-guide** technology… Most **tourists were still booking** their guided tours **through telephone calls or email,** so we had to **employ many people** for booking and customer assistance. What's more, e**veryone finishing** their tour of the Basilica **asked for a paper map** of Rome. The internet **was very expensive and no-one had offline mapping** on their telephone.

After 2014: the revolution started

By 2014, we increasingly saw **visitors 'doing their own thing'**, often **breaking away** from their group altogether to **explore at their own pace. So** we introduced our **unique hybrid audioguide, Vox360**. Thanks to its **micro-receiver** the Vox360 could **serve as a radio guide** for groups, but it **also allowed pilgrims to independently** enjoy the Basilica at their own pace. A unique optical reader triggers high-quality audio commentary from a graphite underlay on specially treated cards, bringing the paper map alive.

Dome Wi-Fi network

At the **end of 2015, our expanded services meant visitors increased and**, **our online** sales boomed. **Millions of people visited the Basilica that year.** Over-tourism at its finest. To resolve this issue in 2016, we worked with **Cisco to create a huge 'Dome Wi-Fi' system**, with more than **20 routers inside** the Basilica. This meant we were **available to count** how many **smartphones (or device with a Wi-fi connection)** were inside the Basilica, **to which router they were connected**, and consequently, if an **area was over crowded** or not.

Data, trends and analysis

Thanks to the sophisticated back-end software, we could now **control the flows** and **provide accurate advice to visitors** such as: "I suggest you to visit the Dome first and then the Basilica. If you want to have the best experience, start your visit from the last exhibit on the left and then cross to the first one to your right." The software also provided a huge amount of **data and trend analysis** on **tourist and pilgrim habits, movements and interests**. We also started **GPS microchipping guided groups**, to track their movements, monitor their average stay and improve flows and movements, to **avoid 'rush-hours'. All this aggregated data,** helped us plan our **future projects**…
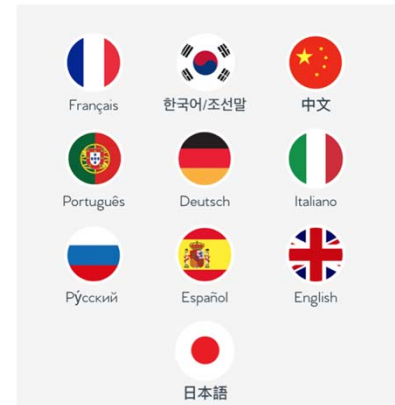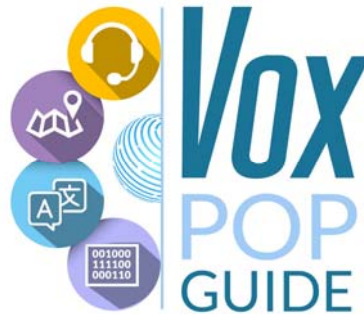
2017: Multi-language, self-guided audio tours using app technology

We realized that personalization through **smartphone app technology** was the **next step. We** set up a **19 person software team** and in **2017 we launched POPGuide – a smartphone app providing a multi-language, self-guided audio tour of the Basilica.** To facilitate this, **we allowed all visitors access to our Cisco Wi-fi,** so that **no roaming was needed, to download the audio-guide.** We also made the app content available and downloadable from home for pre-bookers. POPGuide, also **came with an offline digital audio-map of Rome** where all the major sights were highlighted. **People loved the idea that they could continue** to enjoy the digital experience once they had left the Vatican state. Thanks to POPGuide, **we were now receiving aggregated data on what people were doing in the city, the major sights visited, and the most navigated area**, etc.

In order to enhance our customers' experience, we started to **close deals with other museums**, giving POPGuide users **special discounts or offers.** It proved a great way to also move people **away from the main attractions at peak times and offline geo-tagging meant they could make their way to these venues at any time without being tied to tourist schedules**…

In 2017, we introduced Chinese as a language across all our digital products, which helped us close **further deals with Chinese Tour Operators.**
In the meantime, the **online OTA segment was exploding**, and we were receiving hundred-fold increases in booking, thanks to our partnership to online platforms, such as GetYourGuide, Tiqets and various Chinese partners.

Online Vs Offline Sales

2013

2014

2015

20 | 80

27 | 73

36 | 64

- Offline Sales
- Online Sales

2016

2017

38 | 62

48 | 52
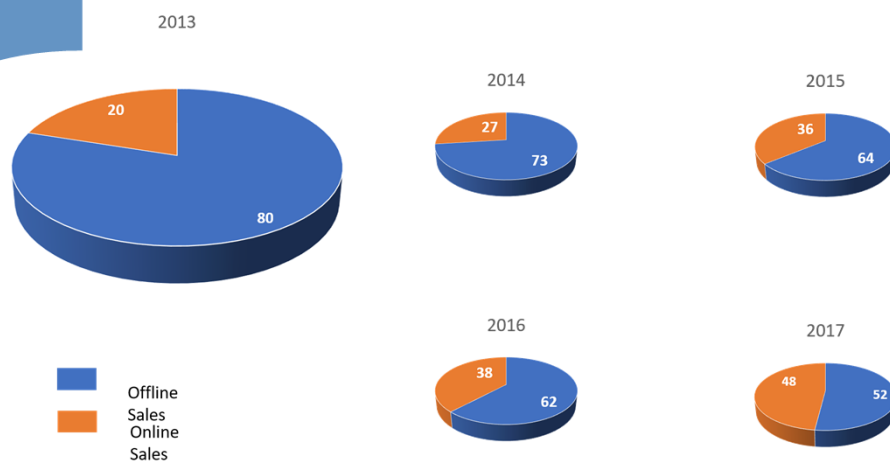
The **online trend has been changing dramatically**. **In 2013 fewer than 20%** of bookings for the Basilica were fully online. Most bought in Rome or directly at St Peter. **By 2017 48% were buying online**. 2018 is continuing this trend.. This increase has not only assisted with cost reduction, but also helped us manage security checks, guiding services, staffing and stocks, etc.

Here and Now
Integrated experiences

So back to the bigger picture and the present… Vox is now using a range of **smart technology** to help tour and cruise operators, travel agents, MICE, museums and venues around the world, to **deliver a better experience to guests.** Our apps can be integrated into travelers' journeys at every level, smoothing their way through their entire travel experience. **And technology is getting more and more engaging. Increasingly, apps will employ artificial intelligence to help with flows and availability, as well as integrated hospitality assistance to make the guest experience more intuitive to their needs.**

Personalising free time
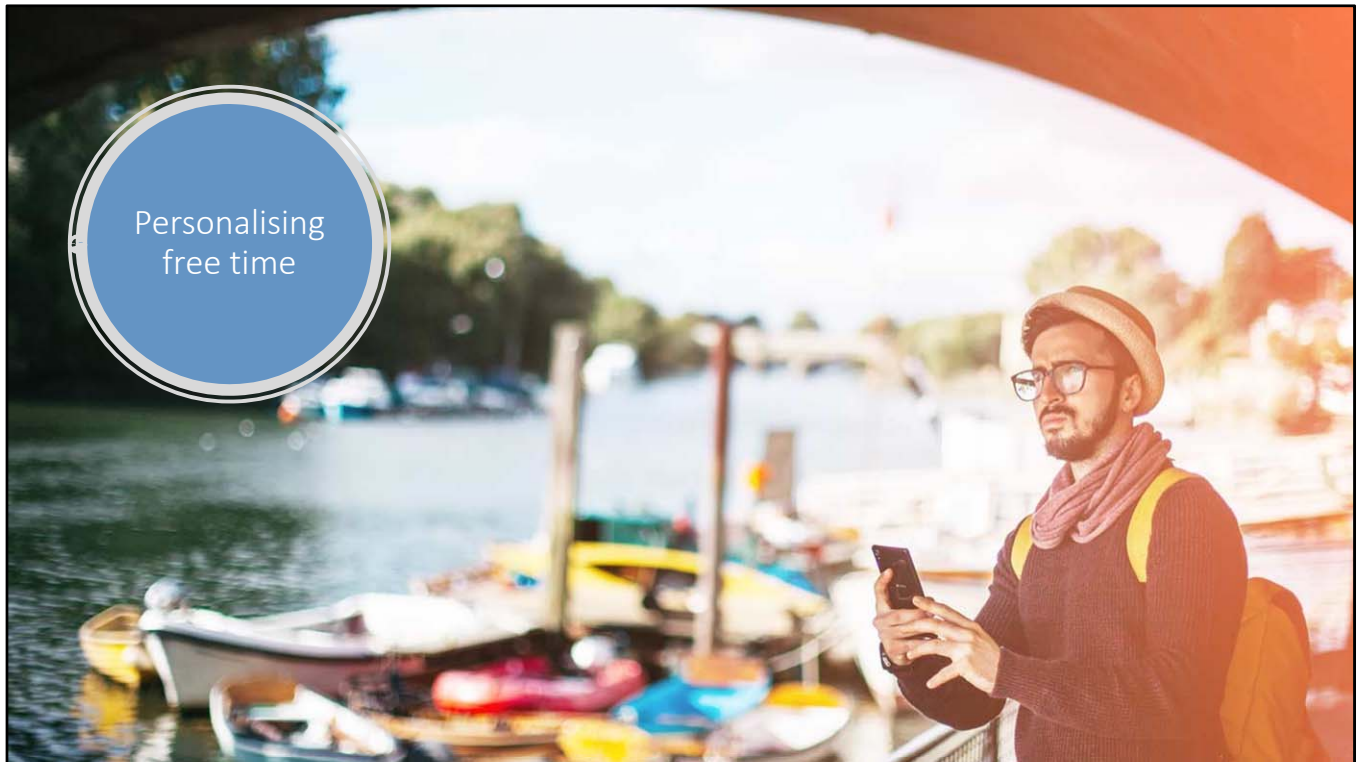
In 2017, we further **enhanced the software** to turn POPGuide into an **effective destination and mapping tool** for **tour and cruise** operators, through which guests could **personalise their vacation** and explore destinations **in their 'downtime' without ever getting lost or losing touch** with their travel organiser.

Tom & Mary.
Kayleigh & Kirsty.

The urgency of action is brought home when you chat to travellers face-to-face. I enjoyed coffee in a café near my office in Rome in July and got chatting to **Tom and Mary**, an Australian couple visiting with their young adult daughters. Just a year ago they had joined an escorted tour, but this time they'd booked everything on their own; *because* they wanted more individuality. They'd paid €700 to a local guy to take them around the city for 5 hours using public transport. A **tour operator providing a self-guiding destination app** would clearly have been the **perfect alternate fit.**

Revise the 'itineraries' rule book

I think operators could do well to rethink the rule book on itineraries - as an alternative to more included activities (even authentic ones), maybe instead think free time and guest independent exploration, assisted by the right tools…

Independent experiences
within tour packages

Today, our **B2B POPGuide** and **B2B2C Vox City Guide** products variously offer **over-branding**, **document hosting and itinerary mapping,** with as **much or as little extra content** as operators wish. You can **programme hotels and sponsor points** with pop-up notifications. You can offer **free-and-easy walking tours** with a choice of **manual or auto-play,** audio commentary and stories from local experts. Everything is possible, from **gourmet food tasting** and wine cellar tours to countryside walks and **cycle trails**. Importantly, guests can use **personal pins** to find their way back to **pickup and docking points**, or favourite locations. As an example, we are currently producing a special map layer with specialised content for a major USA gay accommodation operator for Barcelona, Paris and London.

Supercharging our business model
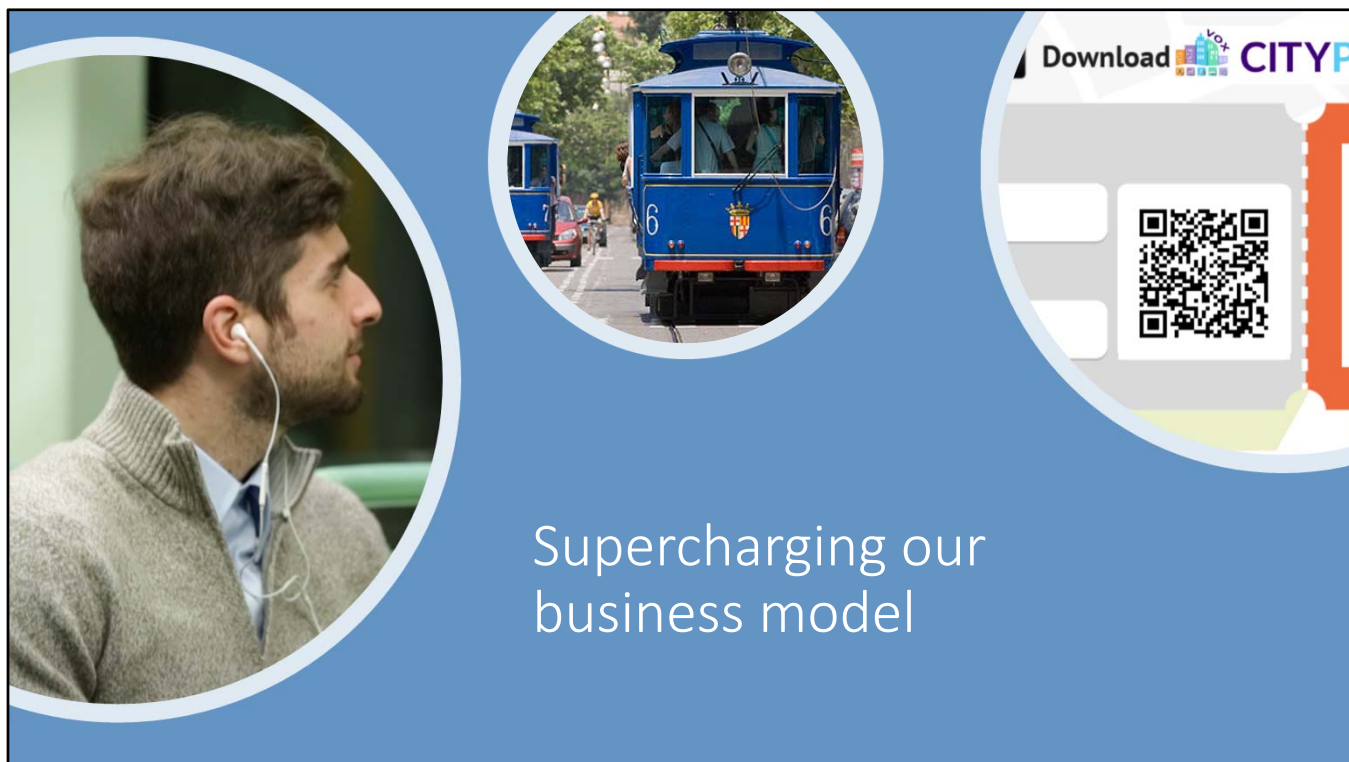
Of course, **speed to market is key**. I believe that **every tourism organisation** should **recognise the urgency** of getting **new ideas on sale** quickly. Over the last six months, we have gone further, and have **moved our entire business model** from **reactive to proactive**. We've expanded our **product development and global sales teams** and launched **three more digital apps** for operators, museums, hotels, agents, venues and MICE companies. We've **adapted our pipelines too**, to ensure we can **deliver new content** the moment we identify an opportunity.
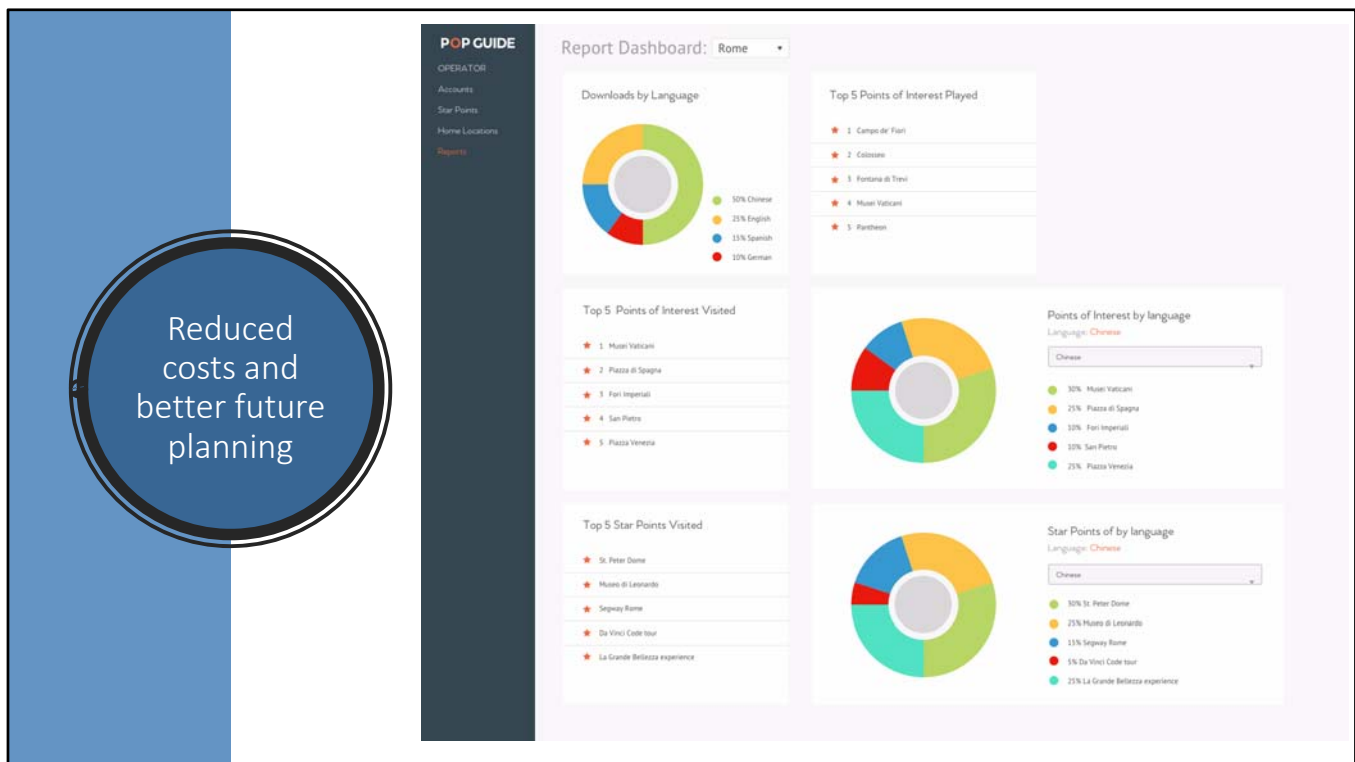
Another major benefit is the data. We'll give you **rich insights** into your clients' **aspirations and behaviour,** from trend analysis of their **in-app activities** and movements, so you can **plan more effectively** for the future. You'll probably find you can **reduce operating costs too**, by removing a few of your heavy excursion expenses.
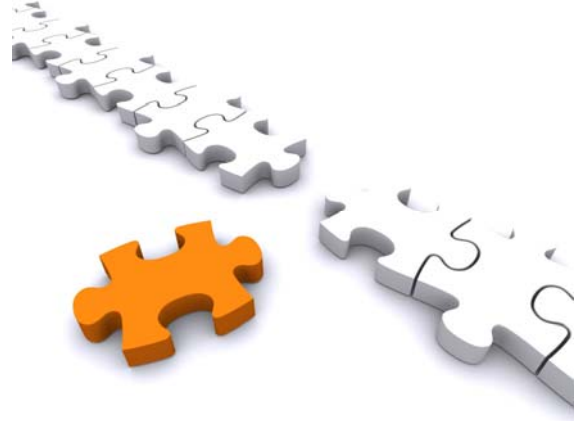
Complement not replace

Like everything, **life needs balance**. **Our goal is not to replace your in-house software solutions**, **ground staff or tour director services**, but to **complement and supplement**. And best of all, we can do all this **without major expense or any up-front hardware costs**. It really is a win-win situation.

MUSEUMS & GALLERIES	**TOURING & CRUISING**	**TRAVEL AGENTS**	**HOTELS**	**MICE**
CITY GUIDE	CITY UNMISSABLE VISITS	CITY EATS		
Vox OVER Wi-Fi	Vox 2GO	Vox TOUR GUIDE SYSTEMS		

Products for smart travel

Discuss today's products

Summary

In summary, my suggestion to you is this: **Embrace** the fact that travellers today want **personalisation**. Radically **rethink** the way you construct your **products** and **give guests the time and means** to occasionally **explore on their own**. They can then **create their own encounters and immersive experiences** *within* the **convenience, security and comfort of your expertly compiled vacations**. Your **cross-sell and upsell** opportunities are countless and your **marketers and PR team** will have one hell of a story to tell. You'll once again be the **hero of the destination.**

Thank you