



Travel & Hospitality Industry

# You Can't Win the Loyalty War Alone:

## Why Brand Collaboration is the Future of Intelligent Travel



The enjoyment gleaned from dreaming of a vacation can fade fast when you actually start planning it. Faced with a dizzying array of choices, consumers may experience a challenging hopscotch through disconnected platforms, apps, and interfaces. Most brands — from airlines and hotels to rental cars and attractions — operate in their own silo, resulting in a wide discrepancy in inclusivity, accessibility, user experience, and rewards programs. And when the travel experience starts to spawn frustration rather than wanderlust, it may lead to loyalty problems.

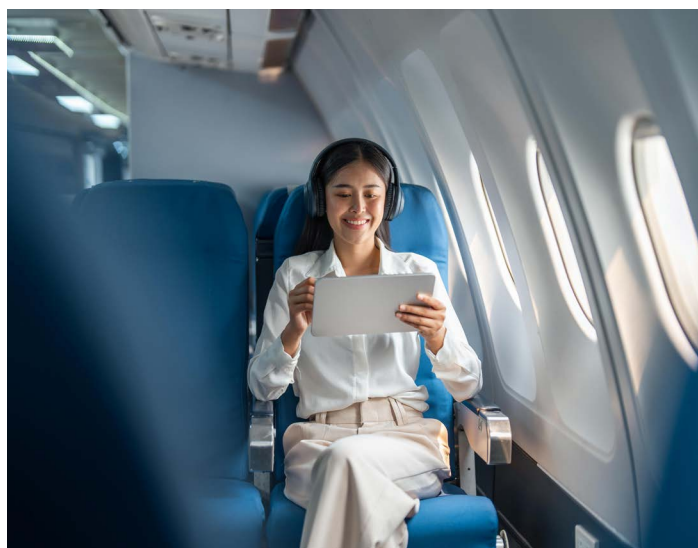


## Today's and Tomorrow's Travel Brand Challenges

The immediate challenge travel brands must contend with is the one we just discussed: how do you cultivate loyalty when choosing a brand feels like a guessing game and using its services feels like an obstacle course?

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to address this challenge while creating a new, perhaps more existentially concerning issue.

By leveraging AI to automate large portions of the planning and booking process, brands can craft a simpler, more intelligent door-to-door travel experience. AskLayla and Wonderplan, for example, are just two of the many AI trip planning platforms that have popped up in the last few years, although they're in for some stiff competition, as Google unveiled its new AI trip planner at its May I/O conference.<sup>i</sup> Meanwhile, airlines like KLM, Delta, and Cathay Pacific offer AI-powered chatbots, and booking platforms like Tripadvisor and Expedia<sup>ii</sup> are integrating AI to make hotel recommendations and share amenity details.



And the global adoption of AI is expanding. Rapidly.<sup>iii</sup>

Which brings us to problem number two. While AI is currently a powerful market differentiator, soon every travel brand will be AI-powered. And when AI is everywhere, how will you stand out? In a future where AI-powered experiences minimize user interaction, what is your brand if travelers never even need your app or website?

The solution to both challenges is brand collaboration. By working together, sharing knowledge, and leveraging combined data, brands can address the short-term hurdle of streamlining the travel experience, as well as the long-term conundrum of brand differentiation.

I'd like to reschedule my upcoming trip.

Hi, Brandon! You have two upcoming reservations. Which do you need help with?



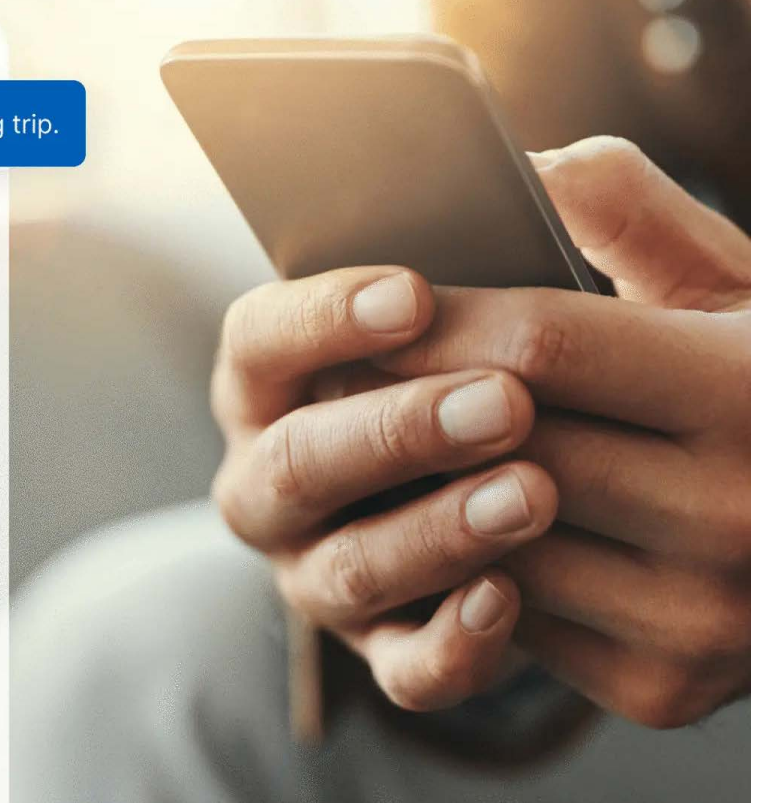
#### The Starlight Hotel

April 21–28



#### The Royal Palms Hotel

May 13–15



## Enhanced Personalization

Personalization creates loyal customers today and ensures those relationships last well into the future. But for truly personalized travel experiences, the lone wolf approach simply won't do. Brands must develop a deep understanding of the customer journey and what travelers need in the moment, and that requires collaboration.

**By partnering with other companies across the door-to-door travel experience, brands can fill in data gaps and generate a much more complete view of their customer than they would on their own.**

For instance, if an airline partners with a hotel to share data like frequent flyer status, meal preferences, and accessibility needs, the hotel can better anticipate and cater to those preferences by offering guests more relevant amenities, tailored dining options, or room upgrades.

Brands offering the same services can also collaborate to enhance personalization. Just look at United Airlines and Air Canada, who partner to personalize services and improve the travel experience for passengers flying on their combined routes.<sup>iv</sup>

## More Meaningful Perks

Perks and rewards are cornerstones of loyalty programs, but their value can vary greatly across travel brands. What's more, the truly enticing rewards often remain out of reach for casual travelers.

By working together, travel brands can bridge these gaps and create a more holistic rewards ecosystem that caters to every customer's unique travel style, not just the most frequent travelers.

Ridesharing services and hotels are embracing this type of collaboration, exemplified by Marriott's partnership with Uber<sup>v</sup> and Lyft's partnership with Hilton.<sup>vi</sup> Hilton Honors members and Marriott Bonvoy members rack up points for riding with Lyft and Uber, respectively, which can be redeemed for hotel stays, room upgrades, and other travel perks.

In a future saturated with AI-powered travel experiences, perk partnerships like these create a compelling value proposition, making them the go-to choice for travelers seeking a rewarding experience.



## Increased Accessibility and Inclusivity

If inconsistent and disconnected user experiences discourage the average traveler, imagine the added obstacles they create for travelers with unique needs. Travelers with disabilities, sensory sensitivities, or diverse needs that address religious preferences and medical conditions have been historically overlooked. According to an MMGY Global report, 96% of travelers with disabilities have had an accommodation problem while traveling.<sup>vii</sup> Another report by Expedia found that 78% of travelers have made a travel choice based on representation in travel advertising.<sup>viii</sup>

**Promoting an ethos of accessibility and inclusion elevates every journey, and when AI becomes the baseline and interpersonal interactions are minimal, this universally human element will take on an even more profound significance.**



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This focus encourages the exploration of new perspectives, fosters a sense of community, and enriches the travel experience for all, creating connections that transcend technology.

Brand collaboration is key to creating a travel experience that works for everyone. By combining resources and sharing data on travelers' unique needs and preferences, travel brands can create a consistently accessible and inclusive door-to-door journey.

To elevate their accessibility and inclusivity efforts even further, brands should also partner with platforms specializing in accessibility and inclusive travel. The cruise line Royal Caribbean, for example, works with Autism on the Seas to develop sensory-friendly spaces aboard their ships,<sup>ix</sup> and Expedia's partnership with the booking platform Wheel the World enables customers to browse an extensive inventory of accessible hotels and filter them by accessibility needs and preferences.<sup>x</sup>

# The Only Way to Stand Out is to Stand Together

Advanced personalization, more meaningful perks, and increased accessibility and inclusivity are the key drivers of short and longer-term growth in the travel industry. Not only do they improve the travel experience for customers of all types, they also position companies for future resilience.

When AI's unique value proposition erodes, customers will gravitate towards brands that prioritize tailoring rich, human-centric experiences to their individual needs and preferences. And the only way to do this is arm in arm.

<sup>1</sup>Google unveils their new AI trip planner," YouTube, May 14, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWMn9XqFI6A>

<sup>2</sup>Tripadvisor and Expedia are integrating AI," Fortune, Jan. 25, 2024, <https://fortune.com/2024/01/25/ai-make-business-better-travel/>

<sup>3</sup>AI adoption is expanding rapidly," Microsoft, May 8, 2024, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/ai-at-work-is-here-now-comes-the-hard-part>

<sup>4</sup>United and Air Canada partner to enhance personalization," PR Newswire, Jul 22, 2022, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/air-canada-and-united-airlines-expand-relationship-to-make-transborder-travel-easier-with-more-choice-301591571.html>

<sup>5</sup>Marriot and Uber partner for better perks," Uber.Marriot, <https://uber.marriott.com/en-us>

<sup>6</sup>Hilton and Lyft partner for better perks," HiltonHonorsLyft, <https://hiltonhonorslyft.com/start?locale=en-US>

<sup>7</sup>Travelers with disabilities experiences accommodation problems," MMGY Global, Aug. 2, 2022, <https://www.mmgglobal.com/news/portrait-of-travelers-with-disabilities/>

<sup>8</sup>Travelers make choices based on representation," Expedia, July 20, 2022, <https://advertising.expedia.com/blog/research/inclusive-travel-insights-report-why-welcoming-all-travelers-matters/>

<sup>9</sup>Royal Caribbean works with Autism on the Seas to enhance accessibility," Autism on the Seas, <https://autismontheseas.com>

<sup>10</sup>Expedia partners with Wheel the World to enhance accessibility," Expedia, March 30, 2023, <https://www.expediagroup.com/investors/news-and-events/financial-releases/news/news-details/2023/Expedia-Group-Announces-New-API-Partnership-With-Wheel-the-World-to-Enhance-Accessible-Booking-Experience-for-Travelers-With-Disabilities/default.aspx>



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Christine has more than 20 years of consulting experience and nearly a decade of hospitality and travel experience. With an emphasis on cultivating the franchisee experience, she has played a pivotal role in transforming operational landscapes for leading global hospitality and travel organizations. Her strategic insights have facilitated the creation of holistic, end-to-end solutions that address every facet of the franchisee lifecycle, propelling franchisees toward unprecedented levels of success and brand satisfaction. As a member of the Board of Advisors for Virginia Tech's Hotel and Tourism Department, Christine stands poised to help clients thrive in the new era of hospitality and travel.



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## Let's do next together.

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