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TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY

27 March, 2009

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Neilson and Expedia come top in study of online customer experience

Neilson and Expedia have performed the best in independent research by customer experience benchmarking company, Global Reviews.

Global Reviews objectively measured online customer experience on six package holiday websites - Neilson, Crystal Ski, Club Med, Mark Warner, Sunsail and Esprit Ski.

It also measured online customer experience on five travel agent websites - Expedia, Lastminute, Ebookers, Opodo and Easyjet.

The research asked consumers what is important to them when considering, selecting and purchasing holidays online.

It then looked at the best websites globally to create best practice benchmarks of how to deliver this content and utility.

The websites were assessed against more than 600 objective criteria, including the information available to prospective customers, customer support and site usability.

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Among the package holiday websites, Neilson came top of the customer experience league table with a score of 57%.

Crystal Ski came second with a score of 48%, followed by Club Med 46%, Mark Warner 44%, Sunsail 40% and Esprit Ski 28%.

Global Reviews said Neilson came top because it was consistently good across all categories - discovery, find, booking, customer support and website utility.

It also reported that:

- Neilson received the highest score of 65% for discovery, which incorporates ebrochure, special offer information, and user generated content. Websites need to score 55% to meet customer expectations but none of the other websites reached this level for this category.

- Club Med was found to offer the best customer experience for finding the right holiday with a score of 56%.

- Crystal Ski and Mark Warner offer the best online booking experience with scores of 51% each.

- Neilson offers the best overall website utility (quality of the home page, search and overall navigation) with a score of 69%.

- Neilson also received the highest score for customer support, which in general was the lowest scoring category.

The variance across travel agent websites was found to be much less, with only 13% difference in the scores.

Expedia came top of the customer experience league table with a score of 59%.

Lastminute came second in the league table with a score of 54%, followed by Ebookers with 52%,

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Opodo with 49 and Easyjet 46%.

Global Reviews said Expedia came top because it was consistently good across all categories, but it stressed there are still areas where Expedia can improve.

All of the websites received good scores for the booking online, the help available online and overall website navigation.

But they all scored badly on content and tools and package information.

The report found:

- Expedia offers the best content and tool online, with the highest score of 44%. The websites were assessed on the quality of the company information, personalisation of content, special offers, maps, travel guides and holiday wizards.

- When it comes to making online bookings, Expedia received the highest score of 65%, closely followed by ebookers with 64%.

- Lastminute and ebookers scored over 80% for their error management system which helps customers through the booking system.

- When it comes to the quality of the homepage, search and overall navigation, Expedia received the highest scored of 70%, followed by ebookers with 68%.

- ebookers was found to offer the best package information with a score of 51%, closely followed by Opodo and Expedia with 49%. Packages look at the quality of the research, the presentation of the results and information on additional activities.

Global Reviews director, Bertie Stevenson said:

"The majority of people now carry out their holiday research online. If customers are unable to find the information they are looking for, or struggle with the booking process, competitors are only a click

away. Companies wanting to improve their customer experience online should start with looking at what their competitors are doing online.”

By Bev Fearis

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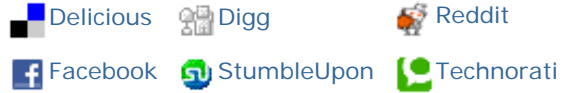
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