# Digital Travel Companies Are Leveraging Contextual Communications to Transform the Customer Experience

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A general move towards digital technologies has been afoot in the travel industry for some time now; savvy travel companies know customer expectations are higher than ever before, and those who resist digital transformation will find themselves losing out to those who have embraced it.



So it's not unusual today for a traveler to receive SMS notifications about flights, hotel reservations, or car rentals, for example; most companies are on board with at least that much digital interaction. But some travel companies are taking this a step further, introducing fully contextual communications to their customers.

## The Power of Cloud Communications

Everybody's least favorite part of customer support is having to repeat your issue at every touchpoint. This gets worse the more channels we utilize. The modern traveler carries a smartphone and uses a myriad channels to communicate—voice, SMS, email, social media, and chat apps like Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp, to name just a few—putting the customer in the position of having to repeat themselves again and again to recreate context.

How often have you been in this scenario: You call your hotel with a reservation problem and explain the issue in full to that customer service agent. The agent responds by telling you it's actually the travel agency that needs to resolve your issue. You're left dialing another

number and telling the entire story over again, hoping that this time, the person hearing it can help. This is a context creation loop, and it's a phenomenon most of us are all too familiar with.

Now imagine you're using a travel agency that offers a mobile application, and within that application are options to contact your hotel, your airline, your driver, and the restaurant you made reservations with for your arrival date. If your flight is delayed, it's a simple matter to log into the app and notify your hotel, driver, and the restaurant of the delay. Even better, the app may incorporate artificial intelligence that will automatically notify everybody involved of the flight delay on your behalf. This is the reality that's made possible today by contextual communications technologies, and it's giving travel companies that utilize that technology a serious edge over those that don't.

## Meet Programmable Communications

So what technologies are powering those contextual, personalized digital experiences? They all fall under the umbrella of CPaaS– Communications Platform as a Service. A CPaaS provider offers APIs that developers can use to achieve programmable, contextual communications. With these APIs, which are essentially feature-rich building blocks that developers can easily put together however they choose, digital travel companies can retain the context of a customer's engagement across channels, protect user privacy, replace physical phone numbers with virtual ones that can be local to any place they're needed, and grow globally with a fraction of the work and time previously required.

Global online hospitality service Airbnb uses technology, for example, that enables users to contact hosts via text without actually exposing their phone numbers or personal information; all communication between a guest and a host happens within the Airbnb platform. This maintains the privacy of both users and eliminates revenue leakage that might be caused by a guest and host taking their communication–and their transaction–off of the platform. And by embedding all communication into the app itself, Airbnb ensures that it remains fully contextual: at no point will you find yourself falling into that context creation loop and repeating yourself to re-establish common ground. The conversation always picks up right where it left off.

If a U.S. customer wants to book an Airbnb in Mexico, the virtual phone number they're given to text will be a U.S. number. The host, on the other hand, will reply to a Mexican number; nobody has to pay international fees, because they're not actually texting another country; they're texting the Airbnb app in the cloud, which is then relaying their messages to numbers in the United States and Mexico.

This doesn't work only in marketplaces like Airbnb. A leading Asian travel agency uses Nexmo's Virtual Phone Numbers to obtain local numbers in all countries in which they operate, even if they don't have offices there. Calls from around the world are all routed to a single call center, but each user is calling a local number. This allows the agency to grow globally very quickly; in essence, they are able to "shrink the world."

So how did this agency do it? They're not a software company like Airbnb; they're a travel agency. But by leveraging APIs, they created the tools they needed to gain a competitive edge and offer an enhanced customer experience. Other travel companies that are on the digital transformation sidelines would do well to follow this company's example.

In the past, software developers needed to learn proprietary languages and write code from the ground up for complex applications like these. APIs are essentially pre-built building blocks, fully written code that developers can adopt and adapt to fit whichever language they're using. Nexmo provides sample code and drastically reduces the manual software development required to turn travel companies into cutting edge communications companies. Companies no longer have to hire developers who are also experts in telephony and communication networks. All of those intricacies are baked into the API.

This also opens the door to nearly limitless innovation; smart developers can use communication APIs to build any number of applications that will improve a travel company's customer experience.

# Magic Bullet for Digital Transformation?

Programmable communication is not a magic bullet that will single handedly transform your travel company, but it's a critical ingredient in the recipe that enables your team to go digital. It's important, though, to be deliberate and careful in choosing how to apply technology to your processes. APIs, after all, are building blocks: what you build is up to you.

Think about which customer interactions in your business can benefit most from these technologies. Are your customers getting stuck in context creation loops? Does your mobile app provide customer service within the app or do you require customers to dial a number and lose the context? What new channels (SMS, chat apps, etc.) do your customers prefer, and can you add them to your contact center?

How can you make your customer's engagement more contextual and more customized?

Nexmo, the Vonage API Platform, empowers companies to experiment and iterate without committing to expensive licenses and contracts through a pay-as-you-go pricing model. Cloud communications providers today are helping companies in every industry level up their communications, and travel in particular is ripe for transformation. Will you be on the cutting edge, or watch from behind as others pull ahead in the digital age?

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