



How to reduce the risk of abandonment on travel sites



The travel landscape is shifting rapidly. As online operators aggressively vie for business in a crowded market with sky-high customer expectations, those that are able to nudge their businesses ahead of the pack are the ones actively embracing the challenges, chasing performance goals and leveraging technology to squeeze out a slim but crucial advantage.

Travel businesses are also facing diminishing returns from budget-busting ad campaigns. According to marketing tech company Ve Global, **abandonment rates (where users begin but fail to complete a travel booking) are running at almost 93%**, causing massive headaches for companies who are spending big on marketing to draw footfall to their websites, only to lose prospects at the final hurdle.

These alarmingly low conversion rates are partly due to savvy shoppers browsing for the best bargains, especially from mobile devices (desktop-based customers are twice as likely – 1:10 – to convert as their mobile counterparts).

Whatever the customer's point of entry, keeping pace with demand is a given. But, the ability to deliver a consistent user experience (UX) on a complex website across multiple platforms is no mean feat, especially once you've factored in the spikes from peak periods that inevitably go hand-in-hand with biggest sales opportunities.

Ensuring smooth performance during peak traffic is something all websites crave. Yet, without the right preparation, a successful marketing campaign can become a double-edged sword – if the platform can't deliver under pressure, it can do more harm than good, denting profits and smearing even the most spotless reputation.

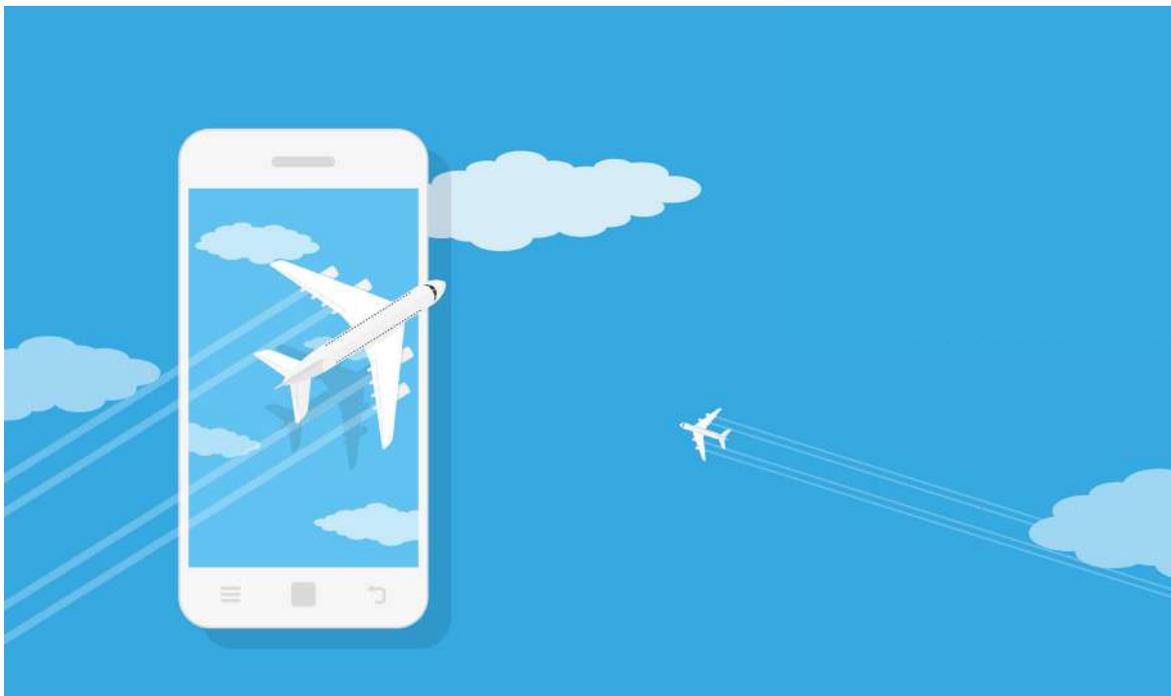


A unique set of performance challenges

In many ways, the travel industry is a victim of its own tech success. With customers warmly embracing the opportunity to browse and book their travel arrangements online, extra pressure is piling on tour operators to provide the ultra-high service levels that are par for the course in other sectors.

The problem for most travel platforms is the highly personalised nature of the customer journey which has many more layers of complexity than most retail websites – even those with a large inventory. Added to which is the, often lengthy, conversion process spanning perhaps a dozen or more visits before the prospect is ready to become a bona fide customer, as well as the need to provide the same reliable interface, regardless of device.

High abandonment rates and lower conversions are exacerbated by slow, error-prone pages which not only prevent bookings but often send holidaymakers to competitors' sites: it's a risk most travel businesses simply can't afford to take. But because performance is dependent on a variety of third parties and multiple APIs that deliver access to reservations, flights – and even the weather forecast – your UX will only ever be as good as the weakest link in the chain.



What you did last year might not be good enough this year – Why?

This year vs last year:

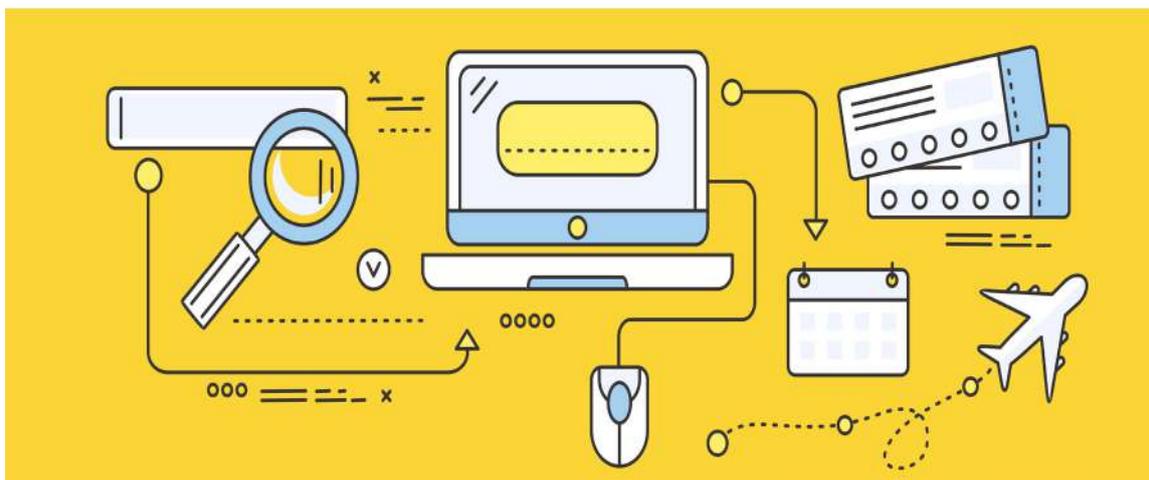
- Web traffic is on the increase
- You have more mobile users
- Personalisation is making your site more complex
- Your dependence on third parties is growing

Legacy systems can no longer cater for today's demanding customer whose behaviour has been shaped by increasingly sophisticated online engagement.

Our experience working with travel clients has enabled us to pinpoint sector-specific online performance challenges which are related to the ability to maintain fast and error-free pages:

- Slow loading times
- Unresponsive pages
- Database problems
- APIs and third-party content issues

The good news is that these issues are preventable – if they are tackled in advance of peak periods rather than as a knee-jerk reaction to under-performance – and will help reduce the risk to your business and your brand.



Run through our quick-fire Q&A and you'll soon see if you're properly prepared or whether your site could benefit from extra risk reduction.

Is my website optimised to respond to real-life customer activity?

All travel websites need to deliver timely content to users, appropriately scaled and tailored to their device without glitches.

Regular load testing is essential to help prevent bugs and bottlenecks from spoiling the UX and to make plans to fix errors before they actually happen. Testing should replicate intelligent journeys based on the actual behaviour of visitors to your site, making decisions on-the-fly like real users. Only by obtaining realistic data can you focus on key performance issues that may be impacting your customers.

Are we delivering a satisfying experience to mobile users?

Customers rightly expect to experience consistency across multiple channels, whether they're relaxing at home in front of a laptop or browsing on the move using a smartphone or tablet. Problems that impact the mobile experience can prove tricky to spot and resolve as issues often arise only a subset of devices, browsers, products or product categories – making it difficult to identify, replicate and troubleshoot.

We recommend 24/7 monitoring that runs on the same iOS/Android software and browsers that your customers, conducting end-to-end journeys with dynamic intelligence and making choices from page content at every step. This means you can share your customer's UX and quickly resolve errors.

Could third-party plug-ins be adversely impacting the user experience?

When it comes to performance, your brand is up front and centre. Even if the majority of content is being served by one or more third parties, you will ultimately be responsible for any dips in performance – which could potentially be damaging to you and your business.

Users don't know – and don't care – who is responsible for slow page-load times or a 404 error. If they don't get the performance they're expecting they'll soon move on to another website and the opportunity to show them your best deals will be lost. At the same time, ensuring that all the components work in harmony to deliver the best consumer experience has never been so tricky. Real-time performance monitoring enables independent visibility of third-party performance so it's easy to pinpoint the origin of a problem and close it down.

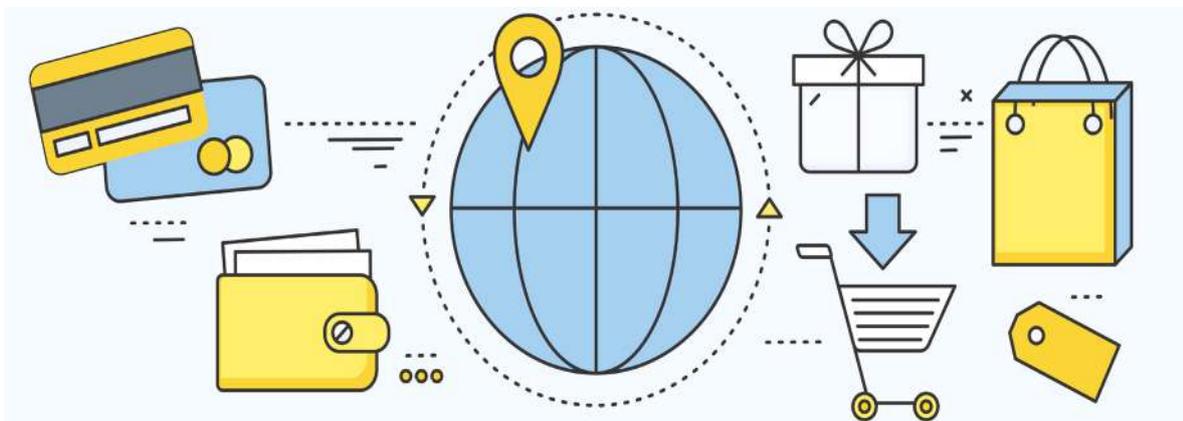
Sharing the load

The digital customer journey in travel is among the longest and most complicated of any online business. With marketers looking to personalise the customer experience through targeted campaigns, it's crucial that travel websites are robust enough to deliver on advertisers' promises.

At SciVisum, we help to spread the load, providing managed, cloud-based monitoring and load-testing services that simulate real customer journeys to give your tech team all the information they need to intercept and resolve performance issues before they become a problem.

With Scivisum you can:

- Test core functionality by following in your customers' footsteps
- Accurately replicate your traffic profile using previous analytics and projections
- Load test critical APIs
- Use real browser monitoring to get closer to the UX during peak periods



For more information on how Scivisum can help
call 01227 768276 or email sv-info@scivisum.co.uk
to speak to one of our website performance specialists.