



TURN INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS
INTO TAILOR-MADE DEVOTEES
From D.I.Y. to by your side

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We in the travel industry are all painfully aware of the rise of “DIY bookers” - those who decide to research and reserve their own travel, rather than go with a tailor-made holiday deal. When it’s easier than ever for travellers to book their own flights, hotels and even excursions, and when algorithms seem to know people better than they know themselves, it would appear they see little need for the expertise of a travel company.

But hope is not lost. Vamoos teamed up with Sapio Research to survey a randomised group of independent travellers to find out what makes them tick. And, remarkably, we found that 46% of people who organise their own travel believe that using a travel company could improve their holiday. A further 11% believe that using a travel company could greatly improve their holiday.

So, you may well ask, if over 50% of DIY bookers believe that a travel company could, in some way, better their holiday experiences... Why on earth are they not using us?

We set about getting to the heart of the matter by asking our pool what would make them switch. In addition, we analysed the differences between why DIY bookers choose to book alone versus how travel operators view their motives - with some illuminating results.

This guide is designed to help you bring DIY bookers to the tailor-made team. It’s full of tangible ways to apply our consumer insights to your marketing strategy, as well as some ideas as to how you might locate and target the elusive independent travellers. Sadly, there is no magic wand you can wave to get them instantly on side; but use this research in strategic and innovative ways, and you might find a way into travel companies’ ultimate untapped resource.

Best wishes

Tony Bean
Founder and Director



WHAT WOULD MAKE DIY TRAVELLERS SWITCH?

As part of our research process, we offered DIY travellers a list of ten reasons for which they might start using a travel company. We offered travel companies the same list, and asked them to select the reasons that they believe would be most persuasive in converting a DIY booker.

There was a lot to be learned from the results. But rather than overwhelm you with numbers, we wanted to share the most relevant figures, and offer practical ways to address them.

So in this chapter, our approach is threefold:

- 1** We're going to take a detailed look at each of the top three reasons that independent travellers said they would switch to a travel company and cross-reference this with travel companies' perception.
- 2** We'll delve a little deeper into the emotional implications of these decisions. American author, salesman, and motivational speaker Zig Ziglar famously said that "People don't buy for logical reasons. They buy for emotional reasons." If you tap into the emotion behind their buying decision, you will communicate on a much more effective level.
- 3** We'll suggest tangible ways to put our findings to use. Our aim is to provide ideas for a variety of brands and styles of marketing.





STEP #1

MAKE YOUR PRICING TRANSPARENT

"The source of fear and anxiety around money is rarely about the facts or reality, but instead is the result of your projection into the future. You imagine all of the horrible things that will happen... To escape that scary future, you take action that you hope will prevent that imagined scenario."

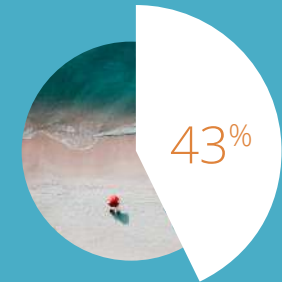
- Mindy Crary,
Money Maven & Business Strategist

THE FACTS

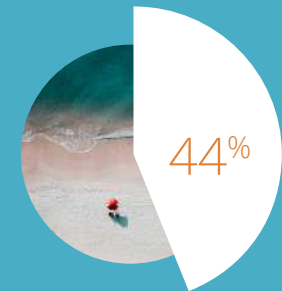
43% of consumers said they would switch to using a travel company if they knew that the price is “the same or better”. This emerged as their number one concern.

By contrast, travel companies seemed to think that convenience (44%) would be the most persuasive factor in making them switch.

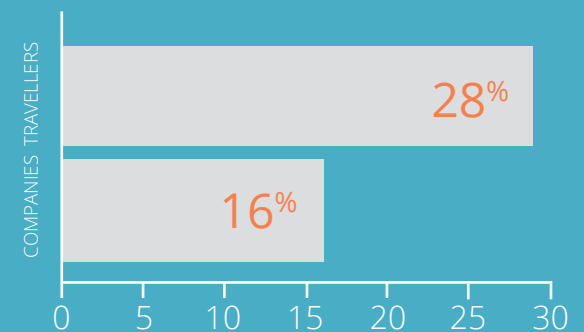
Note that financial protection also ranked highly among the factors that would make a person switch, with 28% of travellers stating they would be tempted by the idea that their money was protected by a government-backed scheme. Interestingly, it seems that travel companies starkly underestimate the value of this, with only 16% ranking it as a potentially converting factor.



DIY travellers would switch to using a travel company if they knew that the price is “the same or better”



Travel companies think convenience would be the most persuasive factor for DIY travellers to switch



Having money protected by a government-backed scheme was ranked significantly more highly as a converting factor for DIY travellers than for travel companies

WHAT IS THE EMOTIONAL DRIVE?

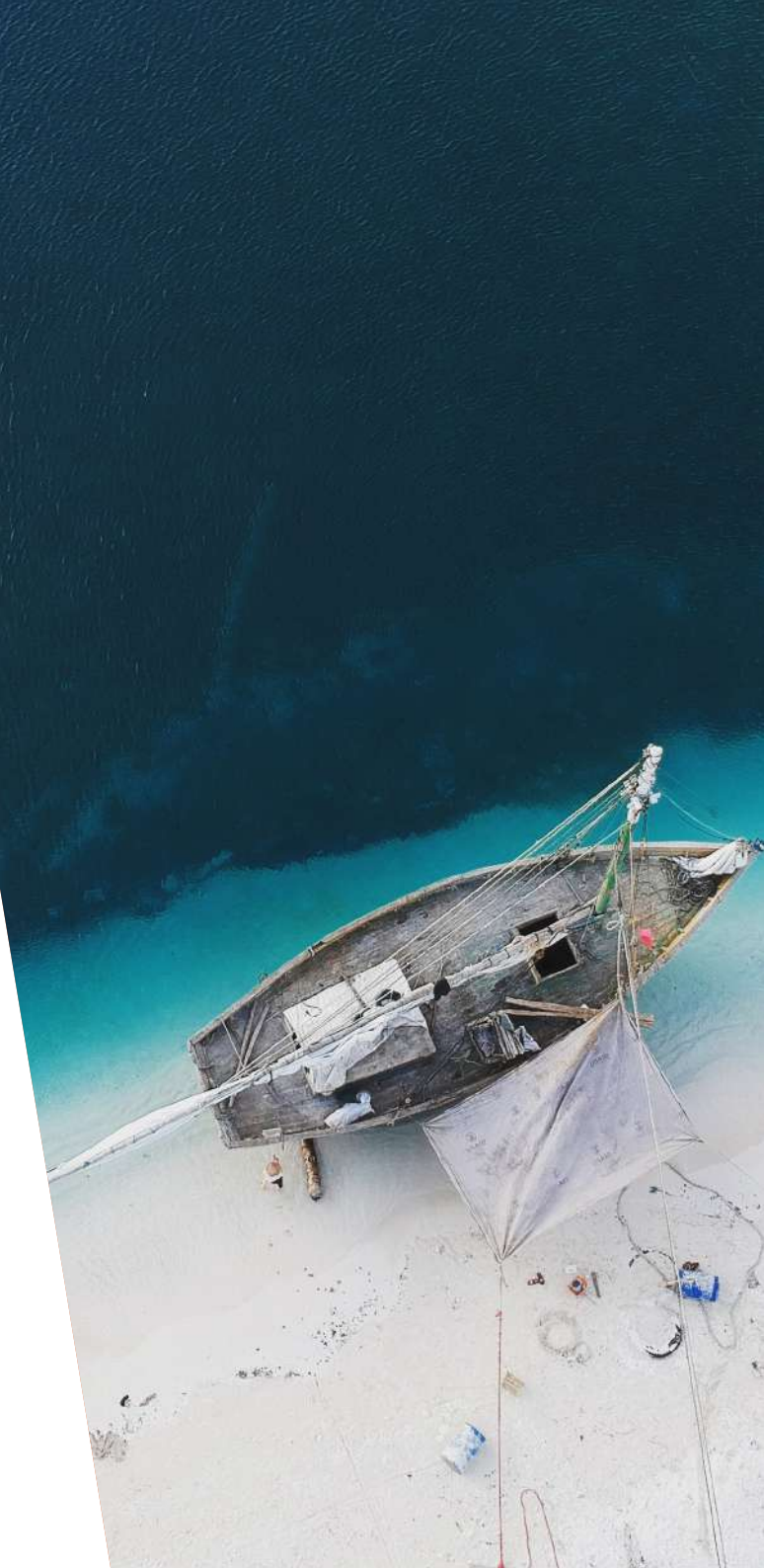
Among people who are able to take holidays, especially those able to take multiple holidays a year (as our group of DIY travellers do; on average, they take between 1-3 holidays per year), stress surrounding money rarely stems from a fear that one literally does not have enough in the bank. Instead, it lies in a fear of insecurity or instability. *By and large, people have the money necessary; it's just whether they are willing to entrust it to you.*

For example, say you are out shopping. You see a jumper you love, but it costs considerably more than you would typically spend on an item of clothing. It's not that you don't have the money in your account - it's just whether you can justify the purchase. Will you wear it enough? Value it enough? Ultimately - can you trust that it's a good investment?



With widely-publicised incidents such as the collapse of Monarch Airlines in 2017 and, more recently, the decline of Thomas Cook, there is already a mounting sense of insecurity among travellers. **It's clear that we need to work harder than ever to gain consumer trust.**

Additionally, our research found that DIY travellers were drawn to luxury search terms. As such, it would also appear that there is a fear of being cheated or "ripped off". When information on hotels and flights is so readily available, combined with the prevalence of forums and discussion groups, people can price check at the click of a button. If travellers feel that a price given to them by a travel company is too high, they can verify their suspicion in minutes.



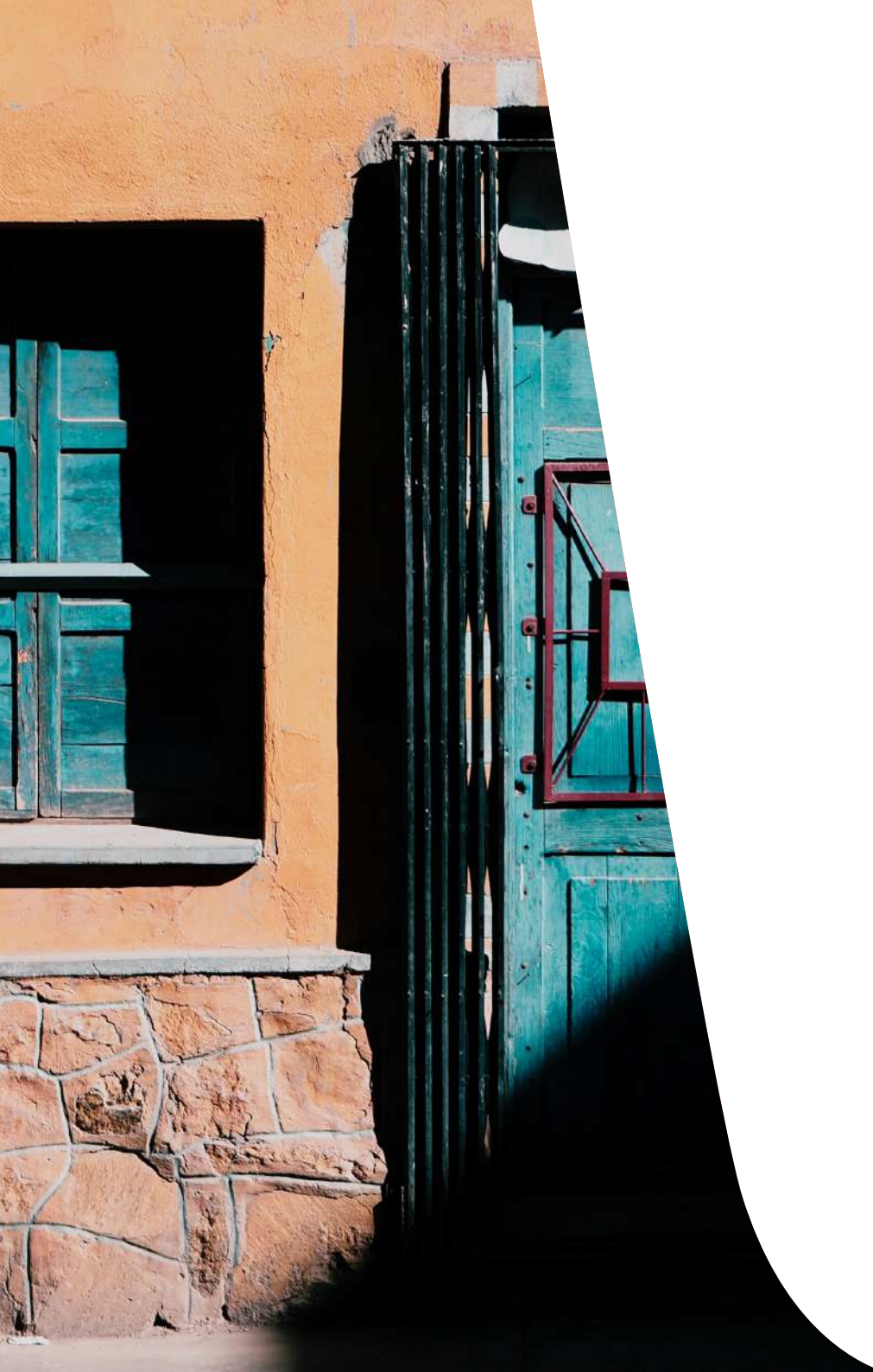


WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

First, *you need to make people feel safe in their buying process*; secure that their money is being well-handled, with their best interests at heart and how you do this depends on your brand.

In an article for Forbes, Brand Strategist Pia Silva argues that “if you have a distinct and compelling brand, with authority-building content... I strongly believe that putting your prices on your site is one of the magical keys to a successful small business.” That is to say, if your USP is strong enough, there is no reason to hide your pricing; to your kind of client, the brand will justify the costs. For tailor-made travel businesses, where there might not be a fixed price list, several indicative executions might work instead.

For those who do not wish to offer a set list of prices, it might be worth producing convincing content that shows the non-monetary value of your holidays. You might not be as cheap as booking it yourself, but you will save clients time, resources and energy - and who can put a price on that?

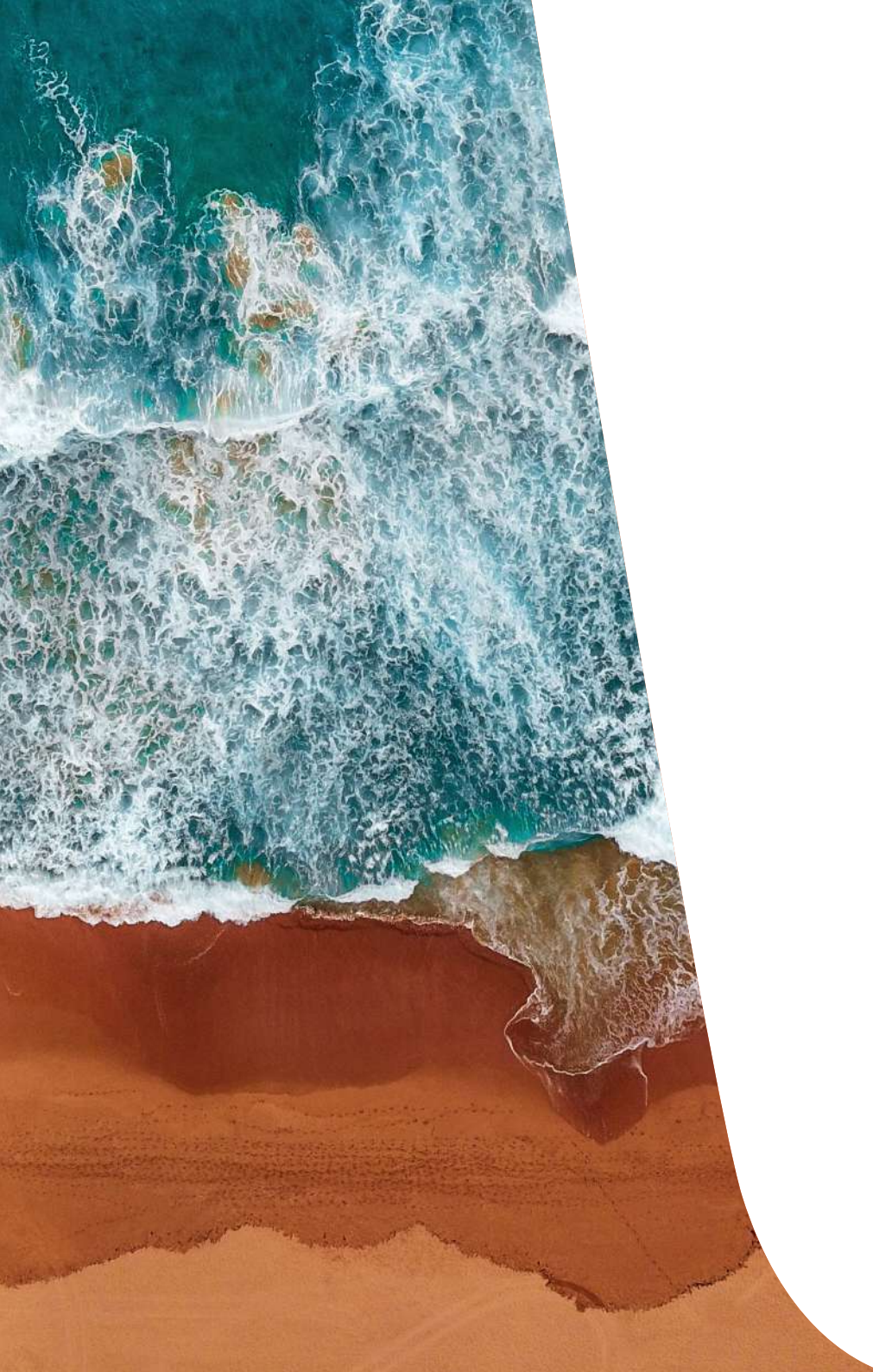


Alternatively, how about offering an authentic case study that shows the comparison between your holidays and booking DIY? Highlight how you negotiate better rates with hotel partners. You could do this via blog or video, if you want to get creative. Often, the price discrepancy is much lower than the client thinks.

Remember to tell travellers that your holidays are financially protected at multiple points throughout your site and booking experience as well. It's not enough to add logos: explain in simple and easy-to-digest language what it means to be a member of ATOL and/or ABTA, as well as any other tourism body that you may be part of.

In addition, in today's world, everyone fears fake reviews. We all remember the case of the man who made a non-existent restaurant the TripAdvisor's number one in London (and if you don't - Google it!) Remind travellers that travel companies are far more trustworthy than the poorly-moderated comment sections of popular review sites...

And, whatever you do, though, do not make unrealistic claims when it comes to prices. People will be left feeling frustrated and let down if you make promises you cannot keep.



SUMMARY

- . The top reason DIY travellers would switch to using a travel company is if they knew that the price is “the same or better.”
- . People have the money necessary; it’s just whether they are willing to entrust it to you.
- . You need to make people feel safe in their buying process e.g. putting your prices on your site, produce content that shows the non-monetary value of your holidays or reminding travellers your holidays are financially protected at multiple points throughout your site and booking experience.



STEP #2

CONVEY THE CONVENIENCE

"In recent years, being busy has become an unmistakable badge of honor in many Western societies. It's quite common for people to humblebrag that they don't have a minute to themselves. Feeling busy — that is, perceiving oneself to be a busy person — thus makes individuals feel that they're prized, important members of society."

- The Harvard Business Review

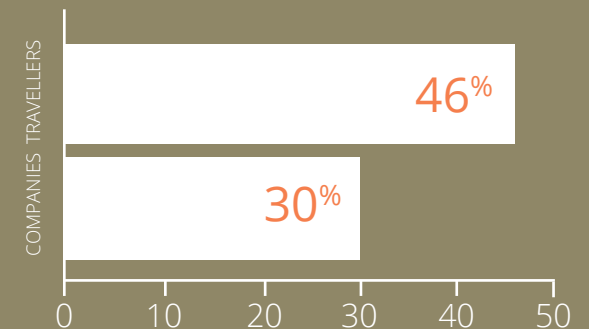
THE FACTS

34% of independent travellers would switch to a travel company for the convenience of having someone organise their transfers, excursions, flights etc. Travel companies considered this to be the most significant factor in swaying their decision.

46% of people who book their own holidays felt that maps and local points of interest would be the most useful content to them after booking their trip, compared to only 30% of travel companies. This suggests that travel companies are perhaps not communicating clearly enough the fact that such information will be readily available post-booking.



DIY travellers would switch to a travel company for convenience



Maps and points of interests were ranked more highly as the most useful content after booking a trip for DIY travellers than for travel companies

WHAT IS THE EMOTIONAL DRIVE?

Of course it's possible for people to be, unequivocally, far too busy to plan a holiday. But, it's more likely that they perceive themselves to be too busy to plan a holiday, and thus a travel company would alleviate them of this burden.

The idea of oneself as incredibly busy, and in need of things to make life easier, is not a fact, but a worldview; and if you understand how to play into this worldview, then you are more likely to reach people.

Furthermore, this data suggests that **travel companies are likely misunderstanding what information independent bookers would find most convenient**. If you can identify the content that will actually make people's lives easier, and market it to them, then you will be one step closer to proving your value.



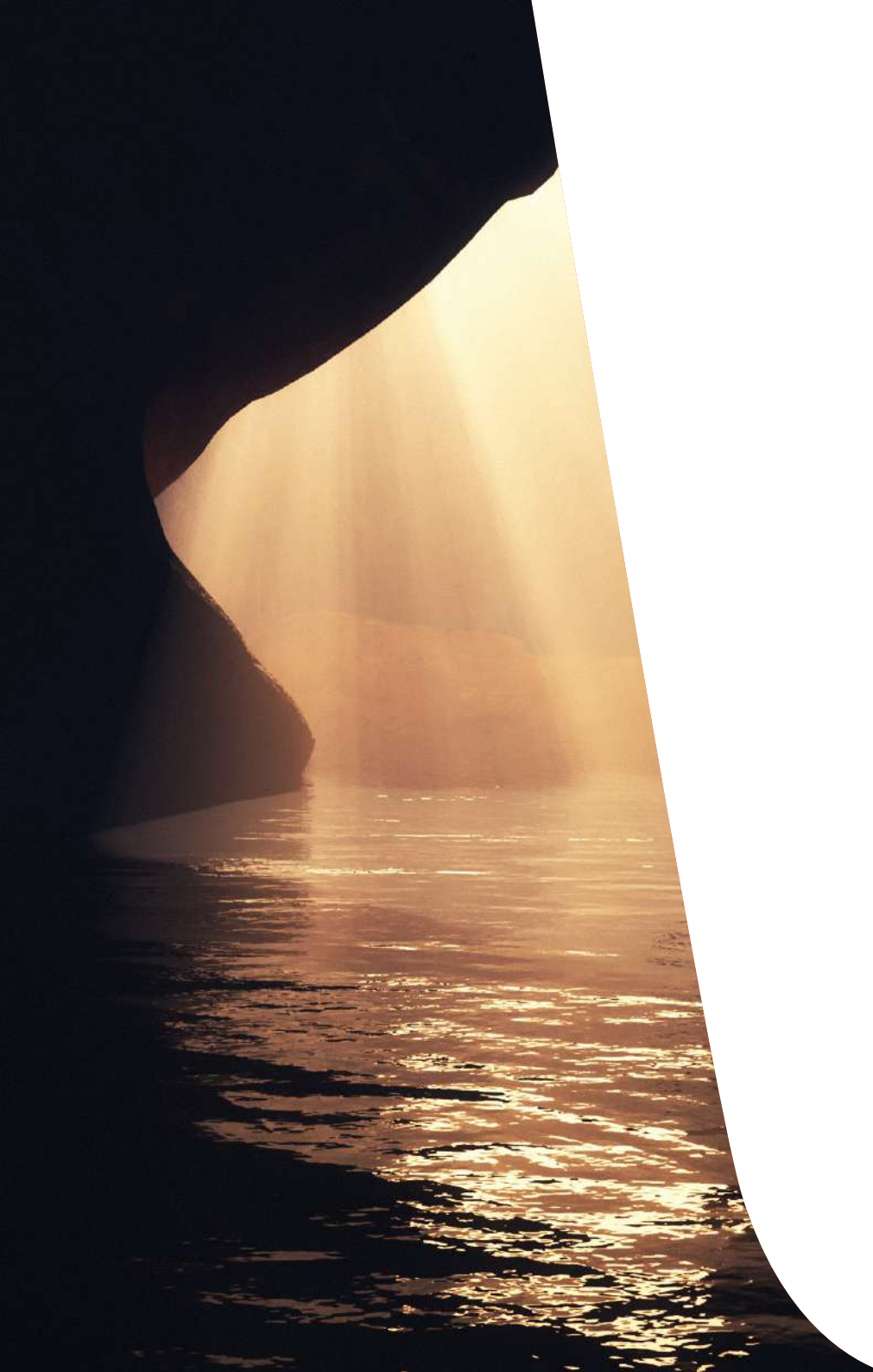


WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Evidently, the key here is to **show that you understand your audience's worldview**. This can be done with imagery and other visual tools, but here we are going to look in a little more depth at how to achieve it with language.

There is a certain knack to it. You need to understand the emotions that underpin the need for convenience, as it enables you to empathise better with your target clients. However, author, sales consultant, and storyteller Marsha Shandur advises that you do not scare people away with overly-emotional language. You might know that the perception of being too busy makes individuals feel that they're "prized, important members of society" - but no one would actually say that about themselves, would they?

She suggests an exercise in which you put yourself in your target clients' shoes, and think about your key "pain points" - the problems, that you as a business, are trying to solve (in this case, the inconvenience of planning a holiday). Now think about how they would express that concern. What language do they use when talking to a friend or family member? Would they say they are "swamped" or "overstretched"? That they "just have a lot on their plate right now"? "It's all just too much"?



The idea is to mirror this type of language in your writing so that people feel your company “gets” them. Try the exercise with your colleagues - it often turns out some interesting results.

Another idea, given that 46% of people who book their own holidays would like easy access to maps and local points of interest, perhaps look at creating some content around this. You might design your own map with your company's top ten “must-see” sights highlighted, along with a little bit of information about each area. This content could be offered in the shape of a blog, video or PDF download in exchange for an email address. *You will be bringing a level of convenience at an earlier stage in the buying process*, which indicates that your services will make life easier further down the line.



SUMMARY

- . Convenience is key with 34% of DIY travellers willing to switch to a travel company for the convenience of having someone organise their transfers, excursions, flights and so on.
- . Travel companies are likely misunderstanding what information independent bookers would find the most convenient such as maps and points of interest.
- . Show you understand DIY travellers pain points by mirroring the type of language they use in your writing and creating content they want to see more of.



STEP #3

APPEASE THEIR CONCERNS

"Give people affection and security, and they will give affection and be secure in their feelings and behaviour"

- Abraham Maslow

THE FACTS

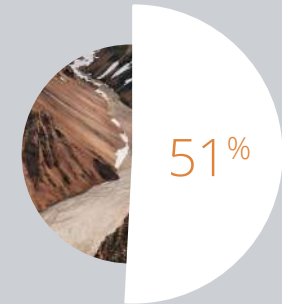
30% of independent bookers said that having someone to help you if there is a problem would convince them to switch to a travel company. Travel companies are very aware of this benefit, with 56% predicting that this would be the factor that caused people to switch.

However, 51% of the travel companies surveyed ranked events such as terror attacks as the number one cause of anxiety in the lead-up to a trip. Yet 54% of travellers who organise their own holiday put making sure they had everything packed as their greatest cause of stress, followed by getting to the airport, at 35%. This suggests that travel companies are not correctly identifying the primary cause of anxiety amongst independent bookers.

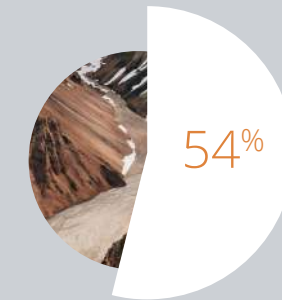
Additionally, we found that men are more likely to be relaxed during bookings than women (38% vs 28%). You can read more about the demographic breakdown of our research in our [Customer Loyalty Report](#). This might be worth bearing in mind throughout the booking process; female clients may, for example, appreciate a few more check-in calls and updates.



Men are more likely to be relaxed during bookings than women



Travel companies think the biggest worry clients have are factors that cannot be controlled, such as terror attacks



DIY travellers biggest worry is that they have everything packed that they need



DIY travellers get stressed about getting to the airport

WHAT IS THE EMOTIONAL DRIVE?

The desire for reduced stress and safety is fairly self-explanatory. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it's argued that humans crave security on a fundamental level. It's one of our baser instincts, but it filters through to all our buying decisions too.

"To purchase, or not to purchase" is just the first part of the equation. Will buying this product, in itself, bring you joy and security? However, when it comes to travel, your purchase often occurs months before the trip itself actually happens - that is to say, there is a long period in which you do not know if your purchase has paid off. This means **there are multiple stages at which clients need reassurance; multiple opportunities for you to minimise the stress, and dial up the excitement of an approaching trip.**

Furthermore, the need for support stems equally from a desire for connection, a sense of not being alone in the process. If you can communicate the feeling of belonging - of support from another human being, rather than a website or machine - you will be on your way to connecting with DIY travellers.





WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

The key here is to **show that you understand people's concerns and convey a sense of security at every touchpoint.**

The research indicates that we should be focusing on the causes of stress that are within each traveller's control. Every holiday is going to involve transport, packing and logistical arrangements; far fewer are going to involve natural disasters or global events.

Addressing concerns around packing is simple: **provide a detailed checklist** of everything they will need to bring before the holiday. This can be online, via your blog or website, or you could produce a well-designed and branded printable copy. The more you can personalise it, the better - why not have separate versions for couples and families, for example?



In terms of flights, the key is to **ensure you have a foolproof system of informing clients about flight times, changes and other details.** Pre-scheduled reminder emails or push notifications via app will do the trick. To go one step further, why not calculate their route from home to the airport - or even organise the transport yourself? It will be minimal hassle for you, and will be enormously appreciated by frazzled airport-goers.

Most importantly of all, when it comes to converting DIY travellers, make sure that you advertise the fact that you will do all this. It's easy to assume travellers know this comes with the experience, but they often don't. This could be the difference that makes them come to you.

On a more subconscious level, having smooth customer journeys in place instils a sense of trust too. **If everything runs like clockwork on a website, emails and information, they will feel that everything will run like clockwork in your product too.**



SUMMARY

- There is a huge discrepancy between what travel companies perceived to be the greatest worry for DIY travellers such as terror attacks compared to the stress and anxiety around logistical details such as what to pack and how to get to the airport.
- There are multiple stages at which clients need reassurance and so multiple opportunities for you to minimise the stress.
- Show you understand DIY travellers concerns and convey a sense of security at every touchpoint by providing a detailed packing checklist, real-time updated about flight times, changes and other details and so on.

HOW DO YOU FIND DIY TRAVELLERS?

We've looked at the key reasons for which independent travellers would switch to booking with a travel company, and suggested ways in which you could apply these findings within your business.

One key question still remains. You've taken on board their concerns; you're using persuasive language that communicates on their level. But how do you make yourself visible to independent bookers? How do you get your game-changing product in front of their eyes?

Unfortunately, there is no one answer to this question. But we have a few ideas that could help you significantly increase your odds.





CREATE NON-BRANDED TRAVEL CONTENT

Evidently, independent travellers will probably not be searching terms such as “tailor-made holiday” or “package deals”. They might use websites like yours to gather information, but they will not arrive there with the intention of booking a holiday. So, why not **look at creating some content that caters to people at the top of the funnel?**

A blog is a great way to do this, as it's linked to your brand while not overtly selling it. With your team, map blog titles for people at the very earliest stages of booking a holiday. Marcus Sheridan, the author of *They Ask, You Answer*, argues that the beginning of every successful content strategy begins with detailing every single question someone who could potentially buy your product might ask, and creating blogs to answer as many of them as possible.

We have already seen that **46% of DIY bookers want to see maps and points of interest**. So you could, for example, create content surrounding the top 10 local points of interest in a given country. You do not need to introduce your brand here, or over-sell your product; simply conveying useful information will help establish you as an authority on the subject.



LOOK OUTSIDE OF TRAVEL

Looking outside the realm of travel altogether can be another great way to attract clients you wouldn't normally reach.

Most travel brands with a strong USP will have another theme that unites their many, if not all, of their clients. Adventure travel companies might safely assume that high adrenaline sports are of interest to their clients, for example. You might then create content surrounding worldwide tournaments, share videos of impressive physical feats or write a guide to famous people in mountaineering history.

To go even further, if your clients tend to be young professionals, why not write blogs on the pressures of office life, rentals or dating? There are ways to position yourself as more than a travel brand - and this might be a great way to put yourself in front of people who would be your kind of client, but have fallen into the habit of DIY travel. (Take a look at our guide to ["finding your travel tribe"](#) for more ideas on this topic.)



Or, looking outside of content creation, you could **develop a partnership with a brand or publication that your type of traveller would identify with**. For example, if many of your clients love to travel for food, you could look at connecting with a chef, recipe website or cooking magazine.

If that is slightly beyond your budget, you might **try connecting with “micro-influencers”** (i.e. people with between 1000 - 100,000 followers on social media) who would appeal to your type of traveller. It’s not the quantity of followers that counts, it’s quality: someone who has 100 followers that would identify with your brand is much more use to you than someone with a million that wouldn’t.



KEEP UP WITH WIDER TRENDS

Keeping up with trends in the industry, and playing to those that might appeal to your kind of traveller, might help you get in front of a traditionally DIY audience.

For example, recent reports show that **sustainability is emerging as a key concern for travellers**. ABTA'S Travel Trends, state "Responsible tourism has been increasing in public consciousness in recent years [as] the number of people who say they would choose one travel company over another if they have better sustainability practices has increased by 10% in just four years."

This is supported by a report from Booking.com which found "Over half (55%) of global travelers report being more determined to make sustainable travel choices than they were a year ago, but barriers include a lack of knowledge and available or appealing options when trying to put this into practice."

Therefore, **showcasing the sustainability of your holidays** might be a good place to start. Content surrounding how to travel more sustainably or reducing your carbon footprint might appeal to your clients, and you could then write a piece comparing the environmental impact of one of your holidays to their DIY holiday, or how travelling with you makes eco-travel much easier.

KEY ACTION POINTS

- Give careful consideration to how you display your pricing page. Transparency is key!
- Explain how financial protection works at multiple touchpoints on your site
- Highlight the non-monetary value of your product
- Make sure to publish content showing the comparison between DIY and tailor-made travel
- Use clear language that reflects the way your clients would express themselves
- When it comes to addressing their concerns, don't be afraid to think small. Airports, connections, packing - logistical details matter most!
- Create content involving maps and points of interest within your destination
- Create content on areas outside of travel that might interest your type of client



CONCLUSION

Many people in the tailor-made travel industry will have no doubt theorised why people choose to book independently rather than with trustworthy, protected experts.

This research was our attempt to put some concrete facts behind the theories. Some of the findings may have surprised you; the importance of comparable price, for example, seems to have been somewhat overlooked by travel companies. The discrepancy between what travel companies perceived to be the greatest concerns of DIY travellers - terrorism and other global events - compared to the reality of logistical details, was particularly striking too.

Use these findings however they will best benefit your business. You may wish to simply apply some principles more generally to your marketing campaigns; or, if converting DIY travellers is high on your agenda, you may wish to develop a targeted campaign. If the latter seems appealing to you, we would be more than happy to help with further advice and tailored suggestions.

One thing is for certain. If you can switch just one person from booking DIY to booking by your side, and impress them with a remarkable trip, you are on your way to overcoming the greatest obstacle to the modern tailor-made travel market. MAKE IT HAPPEN.



METHODOLOGY

Research was carried out within a sample group of 276 consumers who organise their own travel.

61 travel companies were also surveyed.

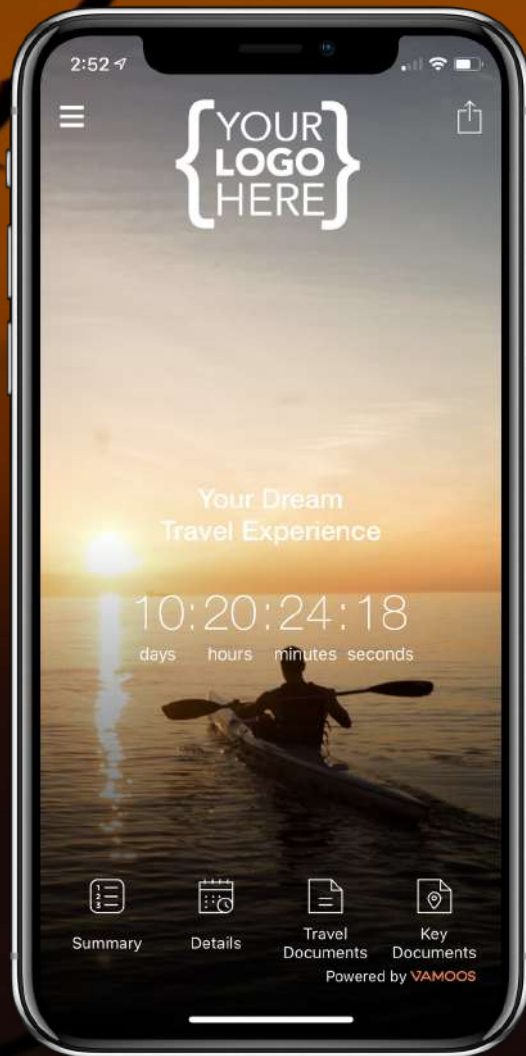
The consumer sample group was asked about their preferences, habits and behaviours.

The questions put to the travel companies focussed on their perceptions of consumer behaviour and their customer base.

The results of the industry survey results are accurate to $\pm 12.5\%$ at 95% confidence limits assuming a result of 50%.

The results of the consumer survey are generally accurate to $\pm 3.1\%$ at 95% confidence limits assuming a result of 50%.

The interviews were conducted online by Sapio Research in July 2019 by means of email invitation and online survey.



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