

With a two-pronged approach to mobile, ebookers successfully increases transactions and builds its brand

ebookers

book easier. travel happier

At a Glance

Goal

- To enable customers to “book easier. travel happier”

Approach

- Launched fully transactional multi-product mobile site
- Followed with release of ebookersExplorer iPad app
- Supported site and apps through advertising and analysis

Results

- 90% jump in visitors and bookings via mobile in first 5 months since launch of mobile site
 - Mobile-specific ad text increased in click-through rates to site by up to 25%
 - 100% increase in downloads of the iPad app after launch of AdMob campaign
-

Ready, steady, go

An online agency specialising in worldwide travel, ebookers.com offers a wide range of products including a choice of over 250 airlines, more than 95,000 hotels, package holidays, car hire and insurance. Its history extends to 1983 when Flightbookers was founded; in 1996 this company became one of the first travel agents to launch an interactive travel website in the UK. The venture was so successful that in 1999 the internet arm was separated, and ebookers.com was the result.

With this strong history of groundbreaking activity in the digital marketplace, it was imperative that ebookers move quickly into mobile. Backed by its slogan “book easier. travel happier”, ebookers adopted a two-pronged approach in entering the mobile space.

Site seeing tour

To fulfil the “book easier” part of their promise, ebookers launched a mobile-optimised website in January 2011. But this wasn’t just any site; it was one of the first fully transactional multi-product mobile sites in Europe. “What we wanted to achieve was really to have 100% the same product that we have on desktop,” explains Director of Product Strategy Rob Define. “We didn’t want to have a small selection of hotels or flights. We wanted to have our entire selection of flights, hotels, car rentals and packages.”

Using exactly the same supply as their desktop platform delivered a number of benefits. It meant that the mobile site offered a lower cost, faster development time and more straightforward support than an app. Based on the prior experience of their US-based sister company Orbitz, ebookers knew that a mobile website would bring more bookings than an app as well. “As an e-commerce transactional website, we wanted to drive through bookings first,” Rob says.

Getting things moving

The second part of ebookers’s mobile strategy was to help clients “travel happier”. “We did that by launching the ebookersExplorer iPad app in May 2011,” Rob reveals. “It’s not a debate anymore about mobile website or apps. You need to have both.”

The ebookersExplorer app set out to build customer value and brand awareness through differentiation, and to focus on innovation and inspiration rather than just transactions. “This app essentially mashes together content from some of the big social media sites out there on the web today. This creates a dynamic travel magazine for our customers. Our customers can take that content and send it out to all of their friends,” Rob explains.

Up, up and away

So what are the results of this activity? In the early days of smartphones, customers could visit the ebookers desktop site via their mobiles. ebookers experienced a 90% jump in visitors and bookings via mobile during the first five months after launching their mobile-optimised site. Rob’s advice for replicating results like these? For both mobile sites and apps, he counsels companies to “advertise and analyse to succeed”.

"It's not a debate anymore about mobile website or apps. You need to have both."
—Rob Define, Director of Product Strategy, ebookers

Rob reports that organic and paid search drive a high share of visitors to the ebookers.com mobile site, so he recommends having a dedicated mobile pay-per-click account to manage all-important positioning. "You need to have a completely different bidding strategy on mobile versus desktop, and by splitting the campaigns you can do that," he affirms. Introducing mobile-targeted ad text is another top tip; ebookers trialed text they borrowed from their desktop campaigns against mobile-specific text and saw the latter deliver increases in click-through rates of up to 25%.

The ebookers team is paying close attention to user behaviours unique to the mobile site too. For example, 60% of mobile hotel bookings are made one day or less in advance and 40% of mobile air bookings made for day trips or one-way journeys. Through data such as this, ebookers can refine its offer to accommodate a whole new set of customer needs. They're also happy to report that customers are taking advantage of the full product offering, not just buying cheaper products. "People are ready to buy big-ticket items on their mobile phone," Rob says.



Meanwhile to promote the app, the team executed advertising on CRM channels, social media and the ebookers.com website. They also enlisted the help of AdMob. "We launched an iPad-targeted specific campaign in all 12 countries where ebookers is present in Europe," Rob says. "As soon as we launched this campaign we saw a 100% increase in downloads of the app, which is phenomenal."

Within a two-week period, the app had begun to dominate in app marketplaces around the world. "The idea is to get a maximum number of downloads in a condensed period of time in order to move up the rankings, so using AdMob to drive downloads was a key part of our mobile strategy."

As with the mobile website, analysis of the app's performance remains paramount. "We wanted to understand consumer behaviour," says Rob, "and an easy way to do this was to implement Google Analytics for Mobile on the app." They are seeing visit durations that are 50% longer than on the desktop website, but less than 2% of their Twitter Zoom pages are being viewed. This kind of information is helping ebookers to prioritise resources and optimise the app to ensure their success in mobile continues.