

A closer look at the fast evolving role of GDS in India

Review the past and you would realise how technologies have converged to bring together experiences that initially weren't even conceptualised. There was a time when travelling used to remind us of long queues. However, with penetration of Internet, the growing acceptance of e-commerce and emergence of low cost carriers, travelling has become shorter and faster. J B Singh, President and Chief Executive Officer, ITQ shares with TTJ his views on the evolving role of GDS in India.

❖ J B SINGH

However, of all the recent technological advancements we have witnessed the most important invention in my mind is the 'Joy' of planning or booking a travel itinerary all at the click of your finger tips with the world right in front of you on a computer screen. And using this screen, the travel agents have played a pivotal role in becoming the game changer for India's travel and tourism sector. Transitioning from offline to online over the years, the online travel agents have taken a leap ahead in providing all possible value-added services to its customers.

It would certainly not be an exaggeration if we give credit to customer behaviour and not only the technology for the involvement of CRS. Today, the customers are aware, has knowledge and plethora of information at his disposable. Thus, his first priority is to look for simplified solutions for his travel plans and backing this desire are the GDS which have made the CRS a smarter tool to adopt.

It has been a while that travel agents have invaded into 'beyond ticketing' segment; primarily the non-air. This segment has a vast set of businesses that have embraced the GDS; including hotels (chains, representation companies, and independent hotel companies), ground and maritime transport (car rental companies, railway companies, ferry lines, cruise lines and insurance companies) and tour operators (specialty, mass-market and vertically-integrated tour operators).

The role of the GDS has evolved with time. It is no longer just a content pipe between airlines and agents, but a full-fledged marketing, retailing and distribution platform, providing new ways to sell a wider range of content than previously possible in the travel channel. Plus, GDS are more aggressive

now to add on more non-air content. Travel agents are getting themselves GDS connected as it is facilitating them to dive into non-air segment like hotels, shopping, rail-booking, travel insurances, in-destination activities, apartment rentals et el. Exemplifying efficiency by collating and integrating pool of information on a same platform will change the face of the industry in years to come. Travel research firm PhoCusWright estimates that Indian travel industry will grow 13 per cent to \$23 billion in the year 2012.

In 2012, we will also witness more technological innovations in the travel sector. In an era when the business environment is changing fast and the pace of change in technology is very rapid, minimising errors, supercharging the transaction speed, manage high growth in volumes and enabling business to be conducted in a real time environment becomes imperative. Aiding back end processes, building new communication and networking platforms, enabling new payment processes, aggregating vast amounts of data and converting it into relevant

information and more is only possible if the technology is advanced.

At the same time, in a fast growing market like India, smart deployment of technology will enable businesses to manage volume growth whilst containing costs.

Thus, Indian travel agents will look forward for evolved technology and assimilated content for increased

productivity and reach, which will be the 'differentiator' in times to come.

Nonetheless, to make this scenario even more exciting, while OTAs have transformed to 'e', 2012 will see the 'm' (mobile) transformation. Google projects that on a global basis, 8 per cent of mobile users will be booking travel from their smartphones by 2012.

