

Converting the masses

There are some simple yet effective ways for airlines to ensure customers enjoy a good website experience – and are eased through the payment process.

Michael Smith explains

LANs are internet pioneers. Not only have they driven website sales, but they have also considered carefully the nature of their brand, and the look and feel of the online experience. This focus on web design is a clear business priority – with the primary objectives of selling the seat as well as the additional products and services.

Rainer Uphoff, a consultant who specialises in airline customer experience at ourpax.com, where he is CEO, explains: “The customer experience is not limited to just what happens at the airport and onboard. It starts with the booking experience, and carriers ignore website functionality at their peril.”

EasyJet is one company that has invested heavily in the online customer experience, and has recently revamped the whole booking procedure. In what is a very slick process, easyJet manages to offer its customers a range of ancillary services without losing focus on the core sale of a seat. However, in common with many other

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Rainer Uphoff, ourpax.com

carriers when it comes to collecting the money, the customer experience is not as developed.

“Early on, we recognised that airlines selling online should have the same focus on the customer payment experience as they do on the rest of the website,” says Sander Maertens, vice president international sales – travel, at payments company Adyen. “We knew from our clients in the likes of the gaming sector that making the payment checkout experience easier led to increased sales.” Adyen then set about exporting this to airline clients.

The results of this approach have been dramatic in terms of sales conversion online. Maertens explains: “We are working with a couple of low-cost carriers on the implementation of the improved payments approach – however, we have every reason to believe it will follow the same pattern as the dramatic increase that [Chilean carrier] LAN has had”.

LAN saw an increase of more than 20% on payment conversions after it implemented the Adyen approach. Uphoff, author of the upcoming *Practical CEM Guide for Airlines*, states: “These are dramatic increases for changes which are easy to make.”

He adds: “This shows how important it is to view payments as part of the whole customer experience, and not as an afterthought.”

The first step in the process is to make sure the payment method is relevant to the customer. In Germany, for example, credit cards are widespread, but not used extensively online, while in Brazil, credit card

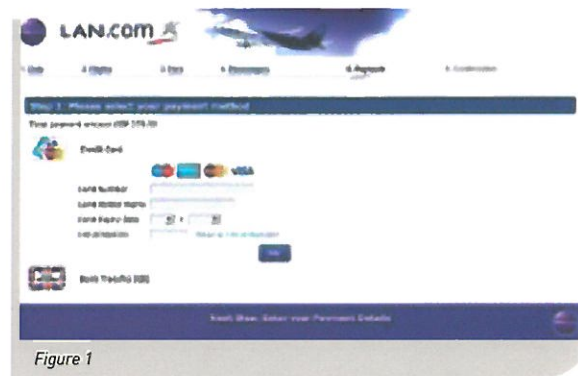


Figure 1

limits are often so low that they will not cover the cost of a ticket. “Tailoring the payment method is the first step to increasing conversion – identifying where the customer is coming from and then offering a payment method they are familiar with,” says Maertens.

Carriers such as AirAsia give you the option on their homepage to select your country and language, which, along with information collected on the booking page (such as passenger name and passport details), can make it easy to select which payment methods are offered to the customer. It is well-established that the fewer steps and clicks, the higher the conversion rate.

The selection of the country dynamically drives the payment options. The selection of the Netherlands, for example, brings up Bank Transfer and iDeal as options, two very popular methods in that country.

The next area of focus is on the payments page, which must follow the look and feel of the rest of the website. One carrier, for example, swaps from Spanish to English on the payments page which is, naturally, off-putting for the customer. And, says LAN, reducing the number of keystrokes on the payment page was vital to increasing conversion.