

Wearables Can't Conquer the Travel Industry World

Wearable technology is slowly but surely becoming a reality. Adoption may be slow, with users as well as industry players still looking skeptically at smartwatches, bracelets and glasses but the potential these wearables have as means of contact and to deliver information is undeniable and is starting to become recognized by the relevant players.



When considering wearable technology adoption, however, one must not forget that not all of it is applicable to every industry. In this context, and seeing as the Apple Watch, which is mainly what the tourism industry has accounted for as far as wearables go, has a much slower adoption rate than that of health devices, one has to wonder about the real potential of these technologies when applied to the travel industry, particularly in the near future.

Still, this doesn't mean service providers should forego these devices, and they seem to be aware of that. In fact, American Airlines, for instance, has enabled boarding passes as well as gate change and baggage claim notifications on the Apple Watch, while Uber enables users to request rides and be notified of their arrival on the watch too.

Hotels are also working with the Apple Watch, enabling guests to check-in, review reservation details, make last minute bookings or even unlock their room doors using the wearable device, among other features.

Farther up ahead of physical services in the adoption curve are tech products like travel management apps Triplt and TripCase, which now support different smartwatches – and not just the Apple Watch – thus enabling users to check their itineraries and receive notifications at their wrists.



According to Concur, the company behind Triplt, the move towards smartwatches is deliberate and stems from a desire to take advantage of emerging technologies and be ready for global adoption when it finally takes place. It is quite clear from the statements made by the company that they see their foray into smartwatches as more of an experiment than anything else, and that they've taken a very cautious approach, especially compared to that used when dealing with more traditional mobile devices like smartphones and tablets, which still dominate the market.

Travel management companies, for their part, are still far behind technologically, but at least one is making the shift towards wearable tech. According to Travel and Transport's COO, the company is now focusing first and foremost on the traveler and on giving them as much information as possible. This effort includes enabling Apple Watch usage, which the company sees as the future of the industry. However, their smartwatch capabilities are still quite rudimentary, as they only enable users to view trip details and perform check-in on certain occasions.

The future of smartwatch-enabled travel is much brighter and promising than this, as the industry's leading players dream up better notifications such as useful reminders about the surrounding environment and activities. And it may actually come to pass, seeing as surveys show a good percentage of travelers already own a smartwatch, and more than half of those who don't plan on getting one soon.

Infrastructure may, however, be one of the obstacles keeping adoption of wearables from becoming more common. At this point, TSA and airline scanners, for instance, are still not ready for these devices, which is certainly discouraging for smartwatch-wearing travelers.

Other people still simply don't see the value of adding yet another device to their already tech-cluttered lives, especially seeing as these devices bring a set of new accessories and tasks into play, and they mainly do the same tasks – if not less – that smartphones do.



The truth is, at this point wearables are nowhere near where they need to be in order to actually become a relevant factor in the travel market, and so service providers still have time to figure out how to incorporate these devices into their mobile strategies. It is also worth noting that, while some companies have taken their lessons from the smartphone boom which took the industry by surprise, some still don't have an actual mobile strategy, which is far more concerning than not having an Apple Watch app ready to use.

The main lesson to be taken here is that, if companies want to adopt smartwatches, they need to go far and beyond to meet the travelers' actual needs and encourage the use of such devices, instead of waiting for them to make the shift when they can simply use devices they already own for the same tasks.

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