

Women and Oldies Are Becoming 'Goldies' for Online Travel Market

In 2009 approximately 44% of all travel reservations are to be generated through the Internet (40% in 2008, 34% in 2007, 29% in 2006). Moreover, another 30% of all travel reservations are to be initiated by the Internet, but made offline via call centers (Merrill Lynch). That means, cumulatively, more than two thirds (2/3) of all travel bookings in the world are influenced by or made via online reservation websites.



With such a huge success of online travel industry, it is interesting and important to discover the demographic roots of this skyrocketing trend. Who are these people digging the Internet and arranging vacations and business trips for their families and colleagues?

A recent survey and statistical study made by IVRA Holding on its worldwide travel reservation system OrangeSmile.com revealed a number of interesting facts and trends.

Trend 1: Women in charge of travel reservations made online

As the study shows females exceed the psychological milestone of 50% of the total bookings made in 2009. That record is quite interesting, taking into account the fact that, in the year 2006, the gender distribution has been fixed on the 51.3 / 48.8% level in favor of male-made bookings. We expect the trend to continue reaching 51.1 % of female made bookings in the year 2011.

What drives this gender trend? From the survey analysis we have identified the following four possible reasons that make this trend happen.

1. Women are becoming more active in their business sphere and, besides that, are more often traveling alone. That one, as well as the next reason, is a consequence of a global feminization.

2. Despite the fact that an average female income is still lower than male's one, women's average salary is growing faster. That certainly increases the degree of freedom for women, which they are enjoying in their spendings and, more particularly, in traveling spendings.
3. Women are closing the gap in the access to and acquaintance with online technologies.
4. The well-known generic fact, that women are responsible for family travels empowers the three abovementioned reasons and finish up the explanation of this trend.

As a side-fact from the OrangeSmile.com call-center statistics: females contact (phone calls, emails) the support center much more often than males. In year 2008-2009 we have registered that 73% of all queries were made by women and only 27 % by men.



Trend 2: Adults 55+ start using online travel sites intensively

What is the age distribution of our bookers?. The strongest trend discovered in the survey is that the share of senior travel bookers is rapidly growing. While in the year 2006 the booking share was 13.9 % out of total bookings, in the year 2008 we recorded the share of 16,7 %, where in the current year 2009 we expect it to reach the level of 18,5 %. The three-year increase is, as in the case of women, quite dramatic: 32 percent. Our predicted share of seniors in 2011 equals 21.5 %.

What has influenced such a trend? Let's look closer at the reasons collected from the survey analysis. There are the following four major influences:

1. Growing acquaintance with the Internet. In the beginning of the century seniors were under-represented in the Internet domains. Nowadays, almost every house has an access to the Internet and seniors begin to learn and use the opportunities provided online.
2. Population is aging in general. According to the research of National Institute of Aging, in the developed countries the percentage of adults 55+ will grow from 24.1% to 31.5% during the decade

2000-2010. This global trend directly influences our reported Internet usage trend.

3. The Internet-aware 'young' newcomers are jumping into the 55+ category.

4. Social factors, such as relatively stable income from the pension funds, increasing quality of medicine support and social care trigger the phenomenon of rising senior tourism.



Looking from a global prospective, due to demographic and social changes, senior tourism will be - at least middle-term (until 2030) - the 'engine of growth' in tourism (Forschungsgemeinschaft Urlaub und Reisen 2004). The number of travelers will increase circa 3.4 million by 2030. Subsequently though, this volume will shrink and arrive at merely 1.5 million more travelers in 2050 than the current value. As such, the proportion of the older elderly will be unmistakably higher and the proportion of the young elderly will be lower than at the present.

Concluding, the global trends on feminization, aging and growing Internet-awareness of previously under-represented seniors and females, influence rapid increase of the share of these two population groups in travel reservations made online.

Women and oldies are the 'goldies' for online travel market? It seems to be true, since the abovementioned trends will continue at least until the year 2030.

Study indicates dissatisfaction among online travel shoppers

Only 46% of U.S. leisure travelers who shop for or buy travel online enjoy the experience, and a still smaller portion, 34%, believe the sites present choices clearly and meaningfully, according to Forrester Research data released in August 09. In addition, Forrester reported, 26% of these online

shoppers would consider turning to a good offline travel agency. That finding suggested brick-and-mortar agencies could be the beneficiaries, but it is important to note this is because the online competition is so poor.

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