

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE



Tourism continues to post positive figures: More overnight stays and more arrivals. But businesses are coming under increasing economic pressure. Higher wages, energy and financing costs are putting operators in a bind who cannot pass on all price increases to their guests.

Digitization is increasingly becoming a matter of economic survival. The challenges are these: Where can processes be better organized? How can additional sales be generated? And how can decisions be taken based on more information?

In tourism, there is one consistent principle: it is always about the guest. **This determines the direction of travel in the digital tourism world.** Businesses have digitized their websites, booking systems, guest cards, reporting and databases for years - but now the next level begins. Systems have to work more efficiently with each other and become simpler for the people who use them.

Structuring Data, Releasing People

Artificial intelligence (AI) is ideally equipped to cope with the growing amount of digital data and to generate information from it. The work begins at the level of simple, but time-consuming operations: thousands of pictures have to be archived, described and made findable for search engines. AI recognizes images, creates descriptions and translations, and detects outdated images.

The economic benefit of such processes is that employees are released from tedious tasks and thus have more time for the really relevant issues. It does not replace the previous digitization steps, but rather adds value to it by reducing the workload.

Chatbots and the Digital Concierge

But there is also a completely new area of activity at the point of sale: When guests want to know if a mountain railway is open, how much snow there is on the slopes, or when the next bus arrives, they often want a simple answer. They expect information on their smartphone in their own language. Voice assistants serve this purpose.

One example is PIA, a personal intelligent assistant that bundles tourist information on the smartphone. This includes points of interest, events, hiking trails, guest cards, mobility offers and bookable services. These are used to create added value in the region. Offers that are relevant to the guest can be found much better - in addition, AI can analyze which additional services should be available at which points in time and thus generate new sales opportunities.

Looking Ahead: Forecasts, Pricing, and Planning

It becomes even more interesting when the AI calculates probabilities instead of simply describing individual facts. Tourism companies already have data from overnight stays, bookings, and arrivals.

If this is combined with weather forecasts and holiday calendars, AI can use it to calculate arrival and occupancy forecasts. Municipalities, authorities and transport companies can identify bottlenecks earlier with this tool, which in turn helps with personnel planning and safety planning.

Above all, AI makes it possible to create bandwidths of probability distributions in order to be better prepared for future developments. Because it works with data sets that are mostly available in any case - just much more efficiently than a person. At the same time, there is no claim to deliver concrete forecasts.

It becomes even more interesting when the AI uses occupancy forecasts to calculate price suggestions. The dynamic on the pricing side is much greater than previously thought: How prices fluctuate in response to demand has so far been the prerogative of large corporations. Medium-sized companies now have a chance to do the same thing. Experts emphasize that the model must always be taken with a grain of salt. Anyone who wants to use such an AI tool should first have a plausible concept themselves, because the system only considers known data. It is worthwhile if there is good local data that is available in conjunction with voice assistants and similar tools.

Direct Sales as a Strategic Lever

There is another way in which artificial intelligence can make an economic benefit: While a presence on large portals is considered essential for many companies, the associated commission fees can be burdensome. **The more a company can shift its sales to its own website, the more it can save costs.** AI-based tools can support this process by individualizing the offerings and thus increasing the chances of closing a deal.

Maintaining Quality Amid Rising Costs

One thing is becoming increasingly clear: It is crucial to maintain or enhance the quality so that the value proposition to the guest remains attractive. AI can contribute to this by reducing structural costs, alleviating personnel shortages, optimizing forecasts and thus utilizing new sales opportunities. But it cannot replace good product quality and a clear strategy. Perhaps the greatest revelation of years of AI hype is that it is no longer relevant as soon as it is there.

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