

Harvest Digital

Establishing trust online

User reviews are the most
trusted information source
online

User research conducted across the Adviva network
by Nielsen/Netratings, February 2007
Mike Teasdale Planning Director, Harvest Digital

Consumers booking holidays place most trust in user review sites

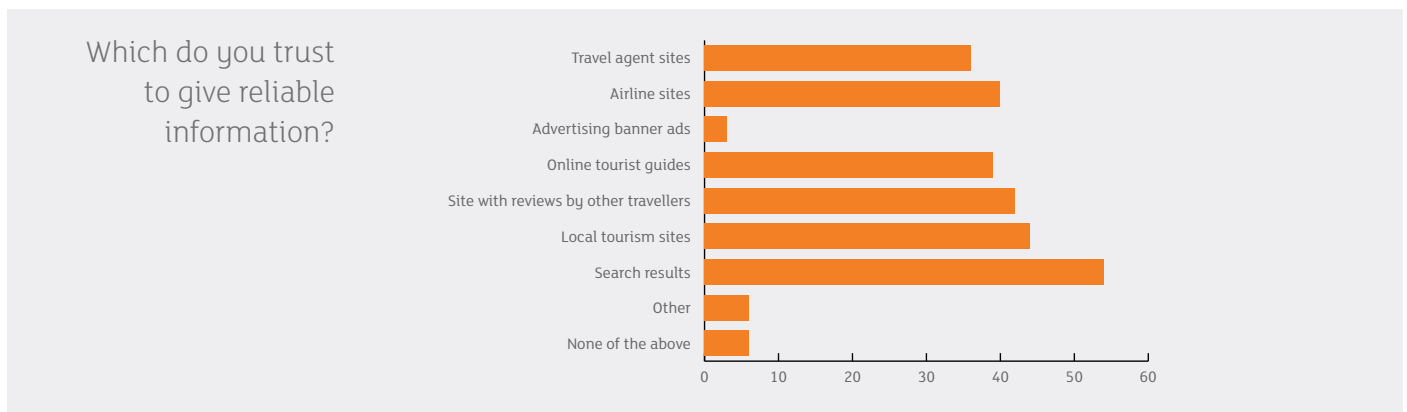
- Online reviews are the most trusted information source

- Frequent travellers rely heaviest on user reviews

- Young people are most influenced by user generated content, older people the least

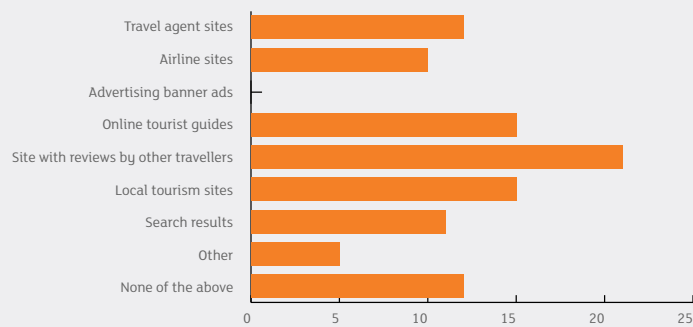
User generated content sites like Myspace and Bebo are some of the fastest growing web sites on the Internet. And when consumers band together to share reviews or opinions, they can be a powerful influence on future purchasing behaviour.

As part of a major survey into how UK Internet users buy flights and holidays, we discovered that 62% of Britons use search engines when booking holidays and 36% use travel agents' own websites. However sites posting user reviews are considered the most trustworthy information source of all.



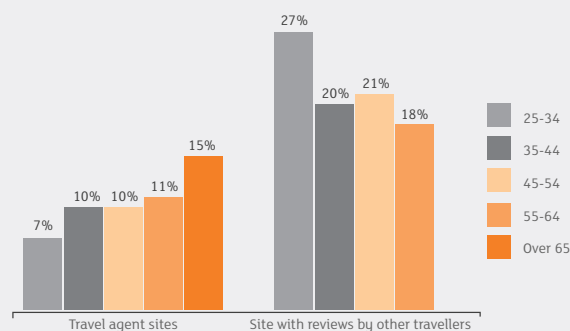
When asked which online source do you trust to give you 'the most reliable information of all' user generated content sites like TripAdvisor were cited by 21% of respondents ahead of 15% each for review sites like TimeOut.com and official local information sites such as Visit Scotland.com. Travel agents' own sites such as ThomasCook.com were considered the most reliable by 12% of Britons online compared with just 11% who selected search engines.

Which gives you the most reliable information of all?



Mike Teasdale, Planning Director at Harvest Digital, comments, 'This research shows that user reviews are not just one of the factors that consumers use to decide between different holidays, but are the most trusted information source of all. Recent moves like the Guardian's new travel portal featuring user generated content and the launch of WAYN suggest that the industry is waking up to the importance of consumer opinions to travel choices. This has implications for all kinds of non-generic services and not just travel. For example, students choosing between different colleges are now very likely to look for the opinions of current alumni before making a decision.'

Age profile of users who trusted travel agent sites & review sites



User-generated content sites are more likely to be seen as trustworthy by women than men and, when it comes to age, are most trusted by 25-34 year olds. However, the validity of user reviews are truly championed by the travel industry's most important group - frequent travellers.

One half of Britons online who take more than five week-plus holidays each year, regard user generated reviews the most reliable – making this group two and a half times more likely than the average online holidaymaker to do so. 33% of frequent travellers regard review websites as the most reliable source of information as do one third of respondents who take four holidays per year.

Frequent travellers were also correspondingly dismissive of the advice offered to them by mainstream travel agents. Nobody taking more than three holidays per year considered travel agents to be the most reliable source of information. Those who do trust travel agents are most likely to be those who take just one holiday per year - one fifth of this group considering travel agent sites to be the most reliable source. This same group is also the least likely to rely most on user reviews.

Although the reliance on user reviews decreases with age, it is still valued by the older generation with 21% of Britons online aged 45-54 and 18% of those aged 55-64 citing it as the most reliable source. The over 65s view online tourist guides as the most reliable online source and this group is the only one more likely to consult a newspaper / magazine article than use a search engine to research their holidays.

Fiona McKinnon, European Corporate Development Director at Adviva, adds, 'The research reveals that consumers are not only using a variety of online sources when researching holiday destinations, but they are also becoming more informed in deciding who they want to travel with. It is important, therefore, that travel companies advertise to a wide reach to encompass the young and old, men and women and also the frequent traveller alongside those who's holiday is a major annual event'

Alex Burmaster, European Internet Analyst at Nielsen//Netratings, continues, 'It is absolutely vital for the travel industry to understand and embrace the revolution of peer-to-peer content online. Whether you refer to it as user-generated content, the 'people's Internet' or Web 2.0, travellers are turning to the collective knowledge and opinion of people they trust the most when booking holidays – each other, not you.'

The research cross-referenced trusted sources of information against the type of holidays that people book online. People booking long-haul, fly-drives or city breaks were more likely to trust online review sites compared with those booking a beach holiday or activity break. Sites with reviews by other travellers were considered reliable by all Britons online, especially 22% of beach holiday-makers and 20% of long-haul travellers.

About the research

Surveys were delivered as a pop up across the Adviva network to Test (exposed) and Control (non exposed) cells. 863 questionnaires were completed in full by male and female respondents of all ages in September 2006.

About Harvest Digital

Harvest Digital is a full-service online marketing agency specialising in media planning and buying, search marketing and online marketing creative.

Formed in 2001, the company is privately owned by staff. Based in London, clients include Tesco, Auto Trader, Thomas Cook, 3M, Tiscali and Shelter.

www.harvestdigital.com

About Adviva

Adviva is the largest CPM focused network in the UK. It places a strong emphasis on building a quality content-driven network providing advertiser's confidence in results in a brand safe online environment. Adviva's comprehensive suite of advertising targeting options include content and channel targeting, behavioural targeting in the form of user profiling as well as keyword contextual targeting.

In order to ensure the quality of the Adviva network Adviva have developed an in-house keyword blocking technology which prevents adverts from showing on pages that have URL's containing inappropriate content. Adviva are the only network in the UK to use this technology as standard across all advertising campaigns.

Adviva is the only UK company to offer proprietary advance targeting technology combined with a comprehensive quality controlled network. Its experience teams ensure the best in customer service through a consultative account management approach.

Established in 2000 and headquartered in London, Adviva expanded in the French and German markets in 2005 with offices in Paris and Munich. It was named the UK's 25th fastest growing technology company in the Sunday Times Tech Track 100 League 2006.

About Nielsen NetRatings

Nielsen//NetRatings is a global leader in Internet media and market research, providing companies with valuable insight into their businesses. Nielsen//NetRatings offers the industry's premier source of actionable Internet data and digital media research on Website usage, online advertising, consumer attitudes and competitive analysis.