

Mobility, Distribution and Customer Friction

HEDNA Mobile Working Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, 51.8% of all of all digital travel booked was done via a mobile device¹, making it clear that mobile distribution is now the predominant way that consumers research and book travel.

As our world becomes increasingly digital, only the easiest companies to work with across all channels will persevere against traditional competitors and unforeseen disrupters. Organizations without a tailored mobile strategy run the risk of creating unnecessary customer friction and missing out on business from a rapidly growing market segment.

In this white paper, we will identify and quantify mobile channel customer friction in the hospitality industry, as well as make recommendations to enhance mobile distribution. Areas of focus include:

- Identifying the primary sources of friction (that is, barriers to conversion) in mobile distribution
- Discussing the commonalities among low-friction channels
- Enhancing mobile distribution with proven best practices



BACKGROUND

The Hotel Electronic Distribution Network Association (HEDNA) Mobile Working Group explores mobile technology's value and helps solve barriers to mobile entry in the hospitality industry. The group evaluates mobile's role in customer acquisition and forecasting, as well as how mobile can lead to a better understanding of the guest.

The group's mission is to:

- Identify existing mobile technology that benefits hotel distribution
- Suggest gaps in existing technology that holds back further disruption opportunities
- Identify what can be done to have immediate impact on mobile distribution

HEDNA MOBILE WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

The HEDNA Mobile Working Group is comprised of members representing suppliers, distributors and intermediaries that are committed to achieving the goal of facilitating the distribution of hotel rates, availability and reservations through mobile interfaces.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

- Donnie Schumann oversees international strategic partnerships for HotelTonight, the world's leading mobile travel application. Previously serving as a manager for HotelTonight's strategic accounts in North America, Donnie launched new destinations and developed expansion strategies for key markets as the company reached profitability in early 2016. He joined HEDNA in fall 2016 as the Mobile Working Group Chair. Prior to HotelTonight, Donnie received his master's in international business from Thunderbird School of Global Management.
- Criss Chrestman, CHTP, has overseen Advisory Services for NTT Data Services' hospitality group for the last six years. Previously, Criss was vice president of software development for Agilysys and has also held positions as chief technology officer, ebusiness practice manager, solution architect and director for inter-American data at ExxonMobil, Sime Darby and Fieldcrest Cannon. Criss has a Bachelor of Business Administration in Management Information Systems, holds two patents, and has developed numerous hospitality and manufacturing applications.
- Edward Perry is the head of partnerships, Americas, at HRS Group. In his position, he supports revenue growth in the leisure and corporate travel segment for hotel chains. Edward is a long-standing member of HEDNA, having recently completed 10 years on the HEDNA board. He holds a master's in global business management.



PROBLEM STATEMENT

Whatever the channel and however customer experience is defined, customer friction is the nemesis of positive customer perception. Customer friction has been defined as “a psychological resistance to a given element in the sales or sign-up process”² and “any aspect of the customer interaction that has a negative impact on the customer experience.”³

The digital age has elevated customer experience expectations, and the hospitality industry is no exception. Today’s consumers expect easy and engaging online and mobile booking options. According to studies, most customers will switch to a different company after a bad product or customer service experience, and 79% of high-income households will likely avoid companies for two years or more after a bad customer service experience.⁴

Keep in mind, customer friction isn’t always the result of high dissatisfaction around a single interaction. Customer friction can also result from a series of little difficulties that add up to an overall negative impression about a brand — a scenario referred to as the aggravation factor. An effective way to increase customer conversion can be to decrease resistance and aggravation during every interaction.

In the race to provide multichannel booking solutions, many organizations simply ported or mirrored their existing online desktop user experiences to mobile devices without taking things such as screen size and form factor into full consideration. It is the Mobile Working Group’s belief that such mobile distributions produce customer friction and barriers to consumers trying to complete their booking goals.

IDENTIFYING AND QUANTIFYING CUSTOMER FRICTION

To help hospitality organizations reduce customer friction and better engage consumers, we sought a way to put ourselves in the shoes of mobile application end users. By understanding, measuring and quantifying these user experiences, we can help organizations determine how to improve customer experience and reduce customer friction. To this end, we selected the NTT DATA Customer Friction FactorSM (CFFSM) Assessment Service, an analytical customer experience scoring approach.

55% of adults are likely to abandon their online transaction if they cannot find a quick answer to their question or problem

— Kate Leggett, Forrester Research Blog, “The Time is Now to Invest in Knowledge Management”



The CFF Assessment Service is a quantitative method for evaluating friction within a customer experience along five factors and driving transformation. It enables organizations to achieve three important goals related to customer friction:

1. **Understand** – Develop an understanding of the target customers and how they conduct business while identifying and quantifying customer friction within that experience.
2. **Gain insights** – Identify the root causes of customer friction, plot a road map and prioritize initiatives that will deliver the greatest improvements in customer experience.
3. **Improve the experience** – Through finding and fixing high-friction areas, organizations can deliver the type of pain-free service that delights customers while reducing or containing internal costs.

The basic calculation behind a CFF Assessment score is uncomplicated. Typically, three customer-facing transactions are evaluated. Customers in this case can be end consumers, partners or employees, and transactions can be online, over the phone or in person.

Evaluators assume an organization's target persona and measure their progress as they complete the designated transaction.

Points are added for factors that take time or energy from a customer, such as being put on hold while an employee searches for another person to help with a problem. Points are taken away for things that simplify a transaction, such as texting a customer the morning of a trip with options for early check-in and personalized services upon arrival.

A CFF Assessment score is just like a golf score: The lower the score, the better. Once an assessment is completed, a report is produced that combines all the individual scores across a transaction to create a single view of customer friction.

By pinpointing the source and extent of customer friction through a CFF Assessment, an organization can quickly see how their challenges compare to the industry and get actionable steps to improve customer experience with quantifiable business value.

The CFF Assessment Service evaluates customer friction on these five factors.

Engagement	The manner in which the company interacts with customers and presents itself to the market
Process	The focus on company and customer activities, and channels contained within a discernable process
Technology	The attention to friction based on technology architecture and customer inputs
Knowledge	The availability, accuracy and utilization of the company's customer and product knowledge
Ecosystem	The measurement of organizational integration and knowledge sharing within itself and third parties

DESCRIPTION OF SOLUTION

In this CFF Assessment, we measured the customer experience of travelers completing transactions on mobile applications from five 'brand.com' hotels and five online travel agencies (OTAs).

Three discrete transactions were assessed:

- **Transaction 1:** Booking a nearby hotel for a one-night stay on the participating mobile application. In this transaction, the customer considerations in mind were that of a brand-agnostic, price-sensitive user.
- **Transaction 2:** Booking a nearby hotel for a one-night stay based on an established guest profile. In this transaction, the customer considerations in mind were that of a brand-loyal, price-insensitive user.
- **Transaction 3:** Utilizing a "Click to Connect" service post booking a room. In this transaction, the customer cons

In addition to the customer considerations noted for each transaction, evaluators assumed either the persona of a business traveler who spends considerable time on the road or that of an infrequent leisure traveler. However, scores between the two personas did not vary enough to be statistically significant, so the results from each persona were averaged together in the final results.

TRANSACTION-SPECIFIC TRENDS

Given the differing nature and objectives of 'brand.com' hotels and OTA mobile applications, it is not surprising that each application set tended to experience its own unique customer friction challenges. Detailed assessment reports for each transaction have been included in the appendix of this white paper, and a high-level summary of key trends follows.

Transaction 1:

- From an engagement perspective, OTAs scored significantly higher because of buried information that forced the customer to spend additional time researching.
- Overall, OTAs generated a higher number of advertisements, pop-ups and cross-selling opportunities upfront, causing immediate friction unnecessary clicks and loss of focus.
- Customers were frequently required to enter previously provided information on OTA applications, leading to a 15% increase in ecosystem scores.

About the mobile applications studied in this CFF Assessment

Source of applications:

- Five leading brand.com organizations
- Five leading online travel agencies

Minimum expectations for these transactions:

- Having a 3G connection
- Having location services set to "on"
- Starting the customer journey on application launch

Transaction 2:

- OTAs' use of advertisements increased the friction score in the technology category, as pop-ups limited viewing and created unnecessary scrolling and clicks on mobile devices.
- In general, OTAs required two to four additional process steps to complete the transaction, allowing for more opportunities to uncover friction and increasing time online.
- The technology architecture for OTAs was typically not optimized as evaluators encountered numerous page refreshes and high load times.

Transaction 3:

- Consumer versus product orientation was blurred from an OTA perspective.
- Offering multiple brands and cross-selling increased customers' confusion and frustration.
- OTAs did not offer a streamlined approach, nor was the customer always able to complete the transaction on the mobile applications.

AGGREGATED RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

When looking at aggregated results across all three transactions, the following findings stood out:

- OTAs scored 56% higher than brand.com hotels on engagement, indicative of issues related to the overall customer interaction experience.
- 19% of all friction points came from user experience and interface issues.
- 40% of friction (OTAs and hotels) was attributed to process challenges

Holistic CFF assessment findings across all three transactions

Engagement	45%	of participating OTAs and hotels had friction associated with multiple solicitations (upselling, cross-selling and membership sign-up) and difficulty locating information that increased evaluator time online. OTAs generated higher friction, with loss of focus caused by more clicks, more distractions and difficult-to-find information.
Process	55%	of applications demonstrated a high reliance on customer-driven process steps, some of which were considered arbitrary or counter-productive for the evaluator to proceed forward in the process. Additionally, the OTAs averaged three more process steps than the brand.com hotels.
Technology	60%	of participants utilized extensive forms and/or broke forms down into multiple pages across the application, increasing time online and customer inputs, and adversely affecting evaluator sentiments. OTAs averaged more forms, higher load times and more page refreshes.
Knowledge	65%	of the applications evaluated did not properly utilize known information to aid the evaluator in the transaction. The overall opinion of evaluators was that the applications did not demonstrate an understanding of their goals.
Ecosystem	85%	of evaluators experienced instances throughout the customer journey that required repeated customer information. This was prevalent across both OTA and brand.com hotel applications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on common themes shared among both high-friction and low-friction distribution channels uncovered in the CFF Assessment, the following recommendations for mobile distribution can be made to reduce friction and, as a results, increase conversion:

1. **Process** – Limit choice by:
 - a. Reducing steps to accomplish the task and avoid overwhelming users with unnecessary choices
 - b. Focusing a consumer on the transaction – booking a room with minimal steps and only the necessary options
2. **Engagement** – Upsell post-transaction or limit to binary options by:
 - a. Unpacking offers on mobile – focusing solely on the room will help streamline mobile engagement
 - b. Upselling via binary options or using targeted emails prior to arrival and/or post-transaction
 - c. Getting guests in and out of the mobile application as quickly as possible
3. **Technology/knowledge/ecosystem** – Reduce forms and information collection by:
 - a. Auto-populating information where possible and refraining from prompting the need for data on multiple occasions
 - b. Reducing the number of steps, which also:
 - i. Decreases the possibility of presenting duplicate and conflicting information
 - ii. Increases the opportunity to give targeted guidance
 - iii. Increases simplicity of utilizing known information to provide assistance

Creating a frictionless mobile experience is imperative to increasing conversions and capturing a wider audience of high-intent bookers in the moment. The recommendations surfaced by our CFF Assessment, while straight-forward, shed light on very simple actions that can be taken to reduce common sources of friction on mobile.

Moreover, it was hypothesized in the recent *Travel Weekly* article, “Why travel hasn’t solved its mobile problem,” that one of the primary driving forces behind cross-device transactions is widespread high-friction booking via mobile. Switching from a mobile device back to desktop due to mobile friction often leads to a higher likelihood of losing out on a transaction to a competitor and essentially wasting targeted mobile ad spend.⁵ If hoteliers and OTAs want to differentiate themselves from their competitors for the foreseeable future, they will need to focus on defining a simple mobile distribution strategy that actually converts and removes barriers rather than remaining complacent with a mobile presence that is better suited for desktop.

CONCLUSION

In the past, businesses focused on internal stakeholders first when building solutions. Today, successful enterprises are turning that by 180 degrees, making customers active participants — and, in the best cases, the prime focus — of their business processes.

As indicated by the results of our CFF Assessment, brand.com hotels and OTAs that adapted their desktop distribution models to mobile channels have in many cases created unintended friction unique to mobile booking. Traditional desktop upsell mechanisms designed to increase consumer choice and engagement can be counter-intuitive to helping a guest achieve their goal of completing a simple transaction on a mobile device.

To overcome this friction, hoteliers must resist the temptation of simply translating their desktop strategy to mobile and proactively reimagine the booking flow through a simpler, more guest-intent-focused lens. While most desktop-oriented channels measure engagement by how long a guest stays on their site (the longer, the better), mobile online distribution should be focused on getting the guest through the transaction funnel as quickly and efficiently as possible.

That means some degree of transformation is necessary to lower an organization's CFF Assessment score, a journey that begins by stepping into the customer's shoes to understand their challenge.

QUESTIONS TO ASK MOVING FORWARD

1. How can your organization simplify your mobile distribution strategy and processes compared to desktop?
2. What has your organization designed into your mobile distribution process to overcome common sources of friction?
3. Based on these findings, does simplifying and reducing choice on mobile make sense alongside your organization's ultimate distribution goals? How does this compare/contrast to your desktop strategy?
4. How else can your organization put the customer first when it comes to user experience design and process decisions?

SOURCES

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⁴ “The good, the bad, and the ugly: the impact of customer service,” by Dimensional Research and Zendesk. <https://www.zendesk.com/resources/the-impact-of-customer-service/>

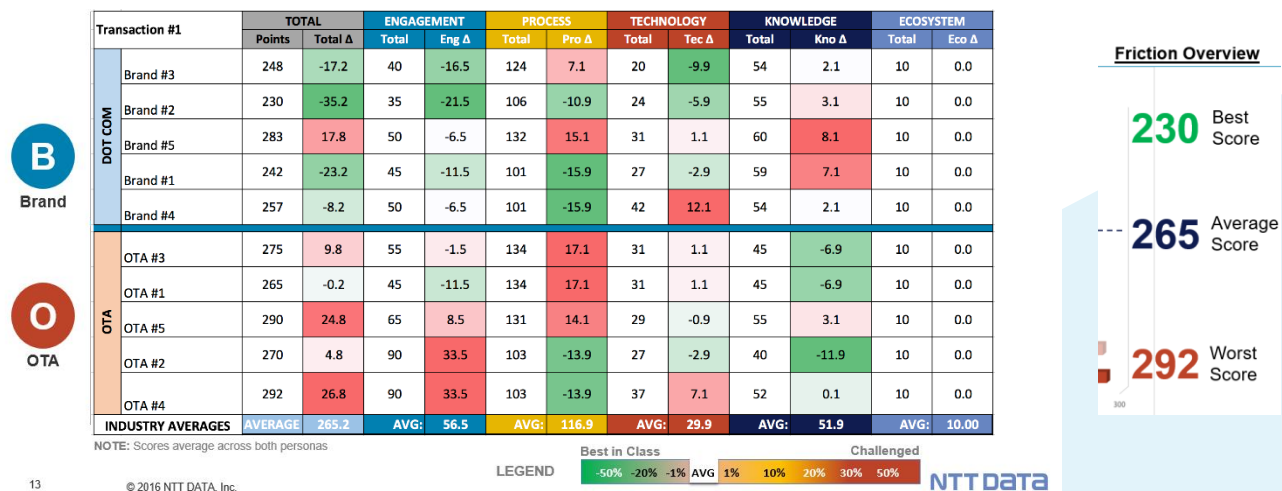
⁵ “Why travel hasn’t solved its mobile problem,” by Kurt Weinsheimer. Travel Weekly, April 26, 2017. <http://www.travelweekly.com/Kurt-Weinsheimer/Why-travel-hasnt-solved-its-mobile-problem>

APPENDIX

DETAILED SCORES – TRANSACTION 1

Transaction 1 measured a user booking a nearby hotel for a one-night stay on the participating mobile application. The average CFF Assessment score for this transaction was 265, as indicated in the detailed scoring table below. Hotel 2 had the best score at 230, while OTA 4 had the most measurable customer friction and the worst score at 292.

Transaction 1 detailed scores



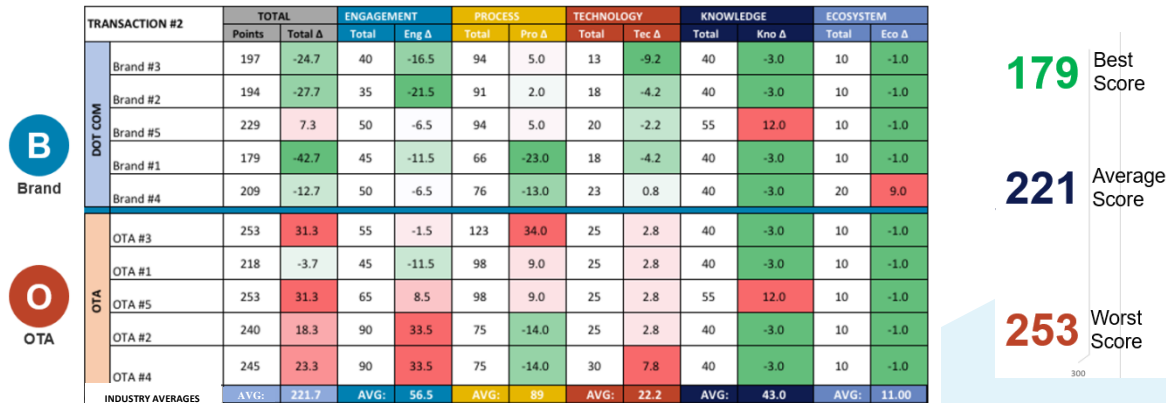
Transaction 1 comparison table

	Brand.com hotels	OTAs	
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys, solicitation and pop-ups were kept to a minimum, assisting in focusing the customer Contact information was easy to locate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buried information and absence of information forced customers to spend time researching There were inconsistencies in branding due to numerous third-party promotions 	↑ 56%
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forms enabled customer focus and were limited to only mandatory fields Customer friction was limited toward the end of the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple forms were spread across a single transaction Forms were broken into a section of their own, increasing customer-driven process steps Numerous upsells created confusion at times 	↑ 7%
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The overall process was streamlined, limiting the number of screens to complete The intuitive user interface (self-guided) assisted in the completion of customer goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluators experienced noticeable lag across the transaction Customers were required to engage more than seven screens, exceeding a best-in-class experience 	↑ 11%
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a single brand voice and style throughout the transaction There were no active or passive knowledge transfers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were no active or passive knowledge transfers On average, customer information was not auto-populated or utilized across the application 	↓ 18%
Ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The transaction appeared to be tightly integrated across the application No hand-off was required to complete the transaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instances were noted of repeated customer information Multiple brand offerings offered opportunity to present conflicting information 	↑ 15%

DETAILED SCORES – TRANSACTION 2

Transaction 2 measured the experience of booking a nearby hotel for a one-night stay based on an established guest profile. The average CFF Assessment score for this transaction was 221, as indicated in the detailed scoring table below. Hotel 1 had the best score of 179, while OTA 3 had the most measurable customer friction and the worst score of 253.

Transaction 2 detailed scores



Transaction 2 comparison table

	Brand.com hotels	OTAs	
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Companies defined the route of process execution Availability of information (fact finding) was more readily accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On average, evaluators experienced a greater number of forms and user inputs Selection/check-out was a high-friction experience 	↑ 56%
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a single brand and style The online experience determined how customers may engage On average, hotels had few customer decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On average, evaluators experienced a greater number of forms and user inputs Selection/check-out was a high-friction experience 	↑ 15%
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The overall process was streamlined, limiting the number of screens to complete Comprehensive form pages offered a more integrated experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were numerous steps/pages and screen refreshes The user interface was not optimized; at times, ads took up ¼ of the viewing space Friction noticeably increased due to lags 	↑ 39%
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was conflicting information regarding pricing shared with the customer There was no passive knowledge transfer; the FAQ serves as a glossary of terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FAQ/help section was more generic in nature Customers must drive the process with inputs in each process Available information was not properly utilized 	0%
Ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The transaction appeared to be tightly integrated across the application On average, there were limited instances of repeated customer information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instances were noted of repeated customer information Multiple brand offerings offered opportunity to present conflicting information 	↑ 7%

DETAILED SCORES – TRANSACTION 3

Transaction 3 measured the experience of booking a room by utilizing a click-to-connect service post. The average CFF Assessment score for this transaction was 288, as indicated in the detailed scoring table below. Hotel 3 had the best score of 264, while OTA 5 had the most measurable customer friction and the worst score of 320.

Transaction 3 detailed scores

	TRANSACTION #3	TOTAL		ENGAGEMENT		PROCESS		TECHNOLOGY		KNOWLEDGE		ECOSYSTEM	
		Points	Total Δ	Total	Eng Δ	Total	Pro Δ	Total	Tec Δ	Total	Kno Δ	Total	Eco Δ
B Brand	DOT COM												
	Brand #3	264	-24.3	40	-16.5	125	1.0	20	-8.9	54	1.6	25	-1.5
	Brand #2	270	-18.3	35	-21.5	116	-8.0	24	-4.9	55	2.6	40	13.5
	Brand #5	285	-3.3	50	-6.5	122	-2.0	28	-0.9	60	7.6	25	-1.5
	Brand #1	267	-21.3	45	-11.5	111	-13.0	27	-1.9	59	6.6	25	-1.5
	Brand #4	275	-13.3	50	-6.5	111	-13.0	35	6.1	54	1.6	25	-1.5
O OTA	OTA #3	300	11.7	55	-1.5	144	20.0	31	2.1	45	-7.4	25	-1.5
	OTA #1	290	1.7	45	-11.5	144	20.0	31	2.1	45	-7.4	25	-1.5
	OTA #5	320	31.7	65	8.5	141	17.0	29	0.1	60	7.6	25	-1.5
	OTA #2	295	6.7	90	33.5	113	-11.0	27	-1.9	40	-12.4	25	-1.5
	OTA #4	317	28.7	90	33.5	113	-11.0	37	8.1	52	-0.4	25	-1.5
	INDUSTRY AVERAGES	AVERAGE	288.3	AVG:	56.5	AVG:	124	AVG:	28.9	AVG:	52.4	AVG:	26.50

NOTE: Scores average across both personas

LEGEND: Best in Class (Green), Challenged (Yellow/Orange/Red)

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264 Best Score

288 Average Score

320 Worst Score

Transaction 3 comparison table

	Brand.com hotels	OTAs	
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information was available and readily accessible Overall, the user interface was less cluttered, which enabled evaluators to accomplish goals on the app The company defines the route of process execution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information was buried; evaluators experienced higher time online researching On average, OTAs lacked focus regarding product versus consumer orientation 	↑ 52%
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a single brand and style There was a streamlined approach for the click-to-connect offering On average, customer time online was lower than OTAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple brands added to confusion for evaluators Pop-ups distracted and, at times, prevented users from accomplishing goals 	↑ 12%
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The overall process was streamlined, limiting the number of screens to complete There was a limited number of customer decisions, enabling faster time to accomplish the goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noticeable lags within the app accounted for the majority of friction in this category There was not a streamlined process for the click-to-connect offering 	↑ 19%
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer information was repeated Instances were noted where conflicting/confusing information was shared with the customer There was no passive knowledge transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was no passive knowledge transfer to assist customers with navigation/understanding Cross-selling/upselling features were, at times, unclear to customers 	↓ 16%
Ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was no discernable difference noted within this category Limited guidance was offered during the transaction More than one system was required to complete the transaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than one system was required to complete the transaction Integration from OTAs to hotels lacked information readily available on the hotel site 	↓ 6%



WE. THINK. DISTRIBUTION.

HEDNA (Hotel Electronic Distribution Network Association) is the premier global forum exclusively dedicated to the advancement of hospitality distribution through strategic collaboration and knowledge sharing. For over 25 years, HEDNA has brought together industry leaders and innovators to explore and influence the world of hotel distribution, providing clarity and insight on the issues that matter.

HEDNA is the hotel distribution industry's leading source for education, collaborative examination and resources. The association's HEDNA University provides introductory and continuing education in hotel distribution, while its Working Groups examine key issues and collect and produce exceptional resources to help guide members.

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