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# What Travel Sellers Should Know About Desktop Widgets

by Sarah Rotman Epps

for eBusiness, Channel & Product Management Professionals



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with Henry H. Harteveldt and Brendan McGowan

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Desktop widgets hold potential benefits for travelers and travel sellers, but only if they are executed well. The best widgets can drive revenue for travel sellers through sellers' preferred channels, as well as deepen relationships with brand-loyal customers. Travel-related widgets give users benefits like exclusive deals, engaging functionality, and convenient links to their commonly used Web sites. To convince travelers that the effort to download and use desktop widgets is worthwhile, travel sellers must provide as much value with as little annoyance as possible — or don't bother with widgets at all.

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We analyzed Forrester's Consumer Technographics® data in the creation of this report. This document details the resulting data, focusing on travelers' use of desktop widgets.

#### Related Research Documents

"Humanizing The Digital Travel Experience"  
August 16, 2007

"How Social Computing Changes The Way You Sell Travel"  
April 30, 2007

"Social Technographics®"  
April 19, 2007

## THE POTENTIAL: DESKTOP WIDGETS CAN BENEFIT TRAVELERS AND eBUSINESS

As travelers become increasingly immune to advertising, email, and loyalty programs, travel sellers like Travelocity.com, Best Western International, and Qantas Airways are experimenting with downloadable software applications that provide a branded desktop link, known as a “desktop widget,” as a new way to connect with customers.<sup>1</sup> According to Forrester’s Consumer Technographics data, travelers are more likely to use widgets for any purpose than nontravelers: In a survey of 10,000 US consumers, 14% of US online leisure travelers reported that they use desktop widgets for any purpose, compared with 9% of nontravelers.<sup>2</sup> A core group of travelers uses widgets weekly and even daily (see Figure 1).

The most notable success story of desktop widgets in travel is Southwest Airlines’ DING! application, which to date has been downloaded more than 1 million times and has generated more than \$150 million in revenue for the airline.<sup>3</sup> As Kevin Krone, VP of marketing for Southwest Airlines, said in a speech at the ATME 2007 conference, DING! succeeds because it “aligns the brand with the customer base.” Indeed, desktop widgets — when executed successfully — provide multiple benefits for both the traveler and the travel seller.

### Desktop Widgets Offer Travelers Exclusivity And Engagement

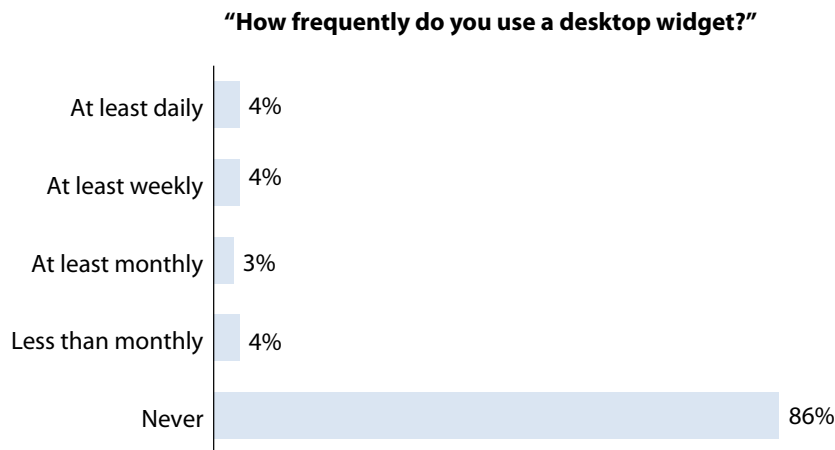
While travel-specific widget adoption is still small, it is more than a microtrend: 4% of US online leisure travelers, or 4.6 million travelers, report using a desktop widget to research travel in the past 12 months.<sup>4</sup> As more travel sellers offer travel-related widgets, they have the potential to:

- **Offer travelers exclusive content and function.** Desktop widgets need to offer travelers a unique value proposition that justifies the effort to download and use them. For example, American Airlines’ new DealFinder widget not only shows exclusive deals but also offers travelers functionality that they can’t get on AA.com: the ability for travelers to name their own price for an itinerary and get alerts when the fare is available (see Figure 2).
- **Provide entertainment and engagement with fun, interactive features.** Forrester segments consumers by their primary motivation of family, career, or entertainment, which helps explain what governs their decision to adopt particular technologies.<sup>5</sup> The majority of travelers who use widgets to research their trips are primarily motivated by entertainment: 54% are entertainment-motivated, versus an average for all travelers of 42%, while 25% are primarily motivated by career and 21% are motivated by family in all aspects of their lives.<sup>6</sup> Hawaiian Airlines plays to the entertainment-motivated segment with engaging features on its Hawaii Anytime widget, such as a streaming broadcast from a Hawaiian radio station (see Figure 3). Orbitz embeds its Orbitz Insider Deals widget with a link to its Orbitz Games Web site.
- **Save travelers time with shortcut links to Web sites.** With embedded links to Web sites, widgets effectively become Web shortcuts sitting on the traveler’s desktop. By creating a shortcut

to travel sellers' Web sites, widgets align the customer's goal of saving time with the business goal of driving customers to the Web site. This benefit isn't restricted to booking; a widget can link users to check in, loyalty program account lookup, and ancillary product lines.

**Figure 1** A Core Group Of Early Adopters Use Widgets Daily Or Weekly

**1-1** Fourteen percent of US online leisure travelers have used a desktop widget



(percentages may not total 100 because of rounding)

**1-2** Frequent widget users are hardcore technology optimists

**Frequency of desktop widget usage**

	<b>At least daily</b>	<b>At least weekly</b>	<b>At least monthly</b>	<b>Less than monthly</b>	<b>Never</b>
Female	43%	31%	37%	36%	54%
Mean age (years)	37	35	33	37	45
College degree or higher	56%	57%	55%	50%	44%
Household income greater than \$75K	51%	53%	42%	44%	44%
Married or partnered	59%	63%	58%	54%	69%
Home broadband	89%	85%	82%	82%	72%
Technology optimist	87%	86%	80%	78%	63%

Base: 8,061 US online leisure travelers

Source: North American Social Technographics® Online Survey, Q2 2007

**Figure 2** American Airlines' DealFinder Widget Offers Unique Functionality

The screenshot shows the American Airlines DealFinder widget interface. At the top, it features the American Airlines logo and the DealFinder title. Below the title, there are navigation links: Home, Book Flights, Flight Check-in, and Gates & Times. The main content area is titled "Saved Searches" and displays two search results. The first result is for "Veteran's Day" with a max fare of \$300, from Boston, MA (BOS) to Los Angeles, CA (LAX), with a departure date of 11/08/2007 and a return date of 11/12/2007. The last search price was \$348. The second result is for "Chicago" with a max fare of \$200, from Boston, MA (BOS) to Chicago O'Hare, IL (ORD), with a departure date of 10/10/2007 and a return date of 10/12/2007. The last search price was \$168. Both results have "BOOK NOW" and "EDIT" buttons. A callout box with an exclamation mark icon contains the text: "Users can specify city pairs and prices and are alerted when their requests are met — something they can't do on AA.com." At the bottom of the widget, there is a "Rent a car for your next trip" advertisement and a note: "\* Additional taxes and fees apply. See AA.com for applicable fare restrictions."

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

**Figure 3** Hawaiian Airlines' Widget Gets Travelers Dreaming About Their Next Trip

The screenshot shows the Hawaiian Airlines widget interface. At the top, it features the Hawaiian Airlines logo and the text "HAWAII! THE ISLANDS OF ALOHA". Below the logo, there is a "HAWAII ANYTIME" button and a list of menu items: WEATHER REPORT, CALENDAR, PICTURE LIBRARY, WEBCAMS, LATEST OFFERS, E-CARDS, and SEND TO A FRIEND. The main content area is titled "WEATHER REPORT" and displays the following information: 8:04 AM HST - FRI DEC 2 2005, HIGH 86°F / LOW 74°F, SCATTERED LIGHT RAIN, Chance Of Rain: 20%, Wind Speed: 8 knots, Direction: (compass rose), Moon Phase: New Moon. Below the weather report, there is a "SURF REPORT" section with the text: "Last report: Thu Dec 1 2005. Surf along north facing shores will increase to 10 to 14 feet Friday. Surf along west facing shores will increase to 6 to 10 feet Friday. Surf along east facing shores will increase to 4 to 7 feet Friday. Surf along south facing shores will be 1 to 3 feet." To the right of the surf report is a "CURRENT TIME" section displaying "FRI DEC 2 2005" and "06:12 AM HAWAIIAN STANDARD TIME". At the bottom of the widget, there is a "91 days 'til island rainbows" button and a "HAWAIIAN HOLIDAYS" button with the text "HAWAII STARTS HERE".

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

### eBusiness Gains A Tool For Driving Revenue And Extending Customer Relationships

At the same time that widgets provide value for travelers, there are several ways in which desktop widgets help eBusiness; they:

- **Generate profit.** The sales generated through Southwest’s DING!, although based on low fares, have been profitable — the widget serves as a tool for revenue management, helping to fill seats at a certain price.<sup>7</sup> Because travelers can input exact city pairs and desired prices, American Airlines could potentially use its widget for discovering demand; if there are enough searches for a given city pair at a certain price, the airline could adjust its capacity and pricing accordingly.
- **Turn the most engaged customers into brand evangelists.** In an environment where digital experiences with travel companies frequently fall short of travelers’ expectations, widgets offer a new opportunity to deepen a company’s relationship with its most enthusiastic customers.<sup>8</sup> Travelers who use widgets for travel research are twice as likely as nonwidget users to consider themselves “brand-loyal” to a travel company.<sup>9</sup> If a widget successfully engages the customer, there’s the potential to turn that enthusiasm into word-of-mouth referrals. Many travel widgets, such as Vail Resorts’ SnowMate widget, have a “refer a friend” button or other features that let users share content through the widget (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4** Vail Resorts’ SnowMate Widget Connects With Travelers Off The Slopes



- **Drive customers to the preferred channel.** What travelers see as a shortcut can be a path for driving revenue for travel sellers: Widgets provide a direct link to a company's Web site, which is the lowest-cost sales channel for many airlines, hotels, and rental car agencies.

### THE REALITY: FEW TRAVEL WIDGETS AVOID COMMON PITFALLS

While desktop widgets, when executed well, do have the potential to bestow the aforementioned benefits on travelers and travel sellers, making a great widget is not an easy feat. Poorly designed desktop widgets:

- **Annoy and distract users.** A user who tries every widget that travel sellers offer would soon experience "attack of the widgets," with airplanes flying across her documents and skiers doing stunts off of her desktop folders. Remember the talking paper clip from early Microsoft Word software? It has spawned descendants in widget form. While some travelers are willing to tolerate widgets for the value that they provide, others will agree with the FlyerTalk contributor who calls widgets "an annoying, invasive marketing strategy."<sup>10</sup> There are two takeaways here for travel sellers: 1) Widgets will never appeal to everyone and, at most, will appeal to the brand-loyal customers; and 2) widgets should provide the most value with the least annoyance as possible.
- **Provide limited utility.** Widgets that are essentially RSS feeds of promotions, like Hyatt's eDeals, offer users limited utility. Travelers may not find it worthwhile to download or retain software on their desktop when they could get the information in other, less-intrusive ways, such as through an RSS reader. Writes another skeptical FlyerTalk user, "I understand the desire behind the applications, but I would prefer everything just be made available via RSS."<sup>11</sup> Widgets need to provide some additional value or interactive features to justify their existence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### DO DESKTOP WIDGETS WELL, OR DON'T DO THEM AT ALL

Desktop widgets walk a fine line between engagement and irritation. Widgets that take up too much desktop real estate, are distracting and bothersome, or offer limited utility will soon meet the “uninstall” fate. Worse, poorly executed widgets can risk alienating formerly devoted customers. Travel sellers considering developing a desktop widget should:

- **Respect the user's desktop.** Widgets should be discreet, taking up as little space on the user's desktop as possible. They should be easy to install, customize, minimize, and, if necessary, uninstall. Importantly, they should be designed to avoid slowing down the computer's processing speed during startup and operation. Travel sellers should also clearly communicate how they will protect users' privacy when they download and use the widget.
- **Offer real value, not just an RSS feed of deals.** It takes commitment to develop a truly unique proposition for a widget, but travel sellers that hope to achieve the success of Southwest's DING! must put forth that effort to reap the widget's full potential. The ultimate tests should be: Does this widget do something that can't be done more easily elsewhere? Is the value provided equal to or greater than the effort needed to download and use the widget? Only travel sellers who can answer “yes” to both questions should take their widgets live.
- **Communicate information at the periphery of users' attention.** Widgets have the potential to be ambient communicators: to convey information at the periphery of users' attention, so that the device does not require the user's full attention to provide value. For example, when users who have Vail's SnowMate widget installed see snow falling on their desktop, that means that snow is falling on the mountain — users can register this information without actively opening the widget and reading the snowfall report. Widgets should also allow for users to turn these features on and off, as SnowMate does, to respect the user's control of her own desktop.
- **Not use the widget as a Trojan horse.** Widgets are effective tools to build or enhance customer relationships, sell products, and support favored channels. But travel executives must resist the urge to co-opt widgets and turn them into tools that support other business goals or objectives that may be important to your business but irrelevant to the traveler. Don't, for example, use the widget to force users into e-newsletter subscriptions or automatically enroll them into your loyalty program.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Seventy-two percent of consumers delete most email newsletters without ever opening them. See the May 1, 2007, "[How To Humanize Email Marketing](#)" report.

"Desktop widget" refers to a software application that can be downloaded to a user's desktop. The term "widget" can also describe a software application that users can insert into a Web site such as MySpace.com or Facebook: for example, a slideshow of photos or a horoscope. See the February 7, 2007, "[Why You Should Care About Web Widgets](#)" report.

<sup>2</sup> Source: North American Social Technographics Online Survey, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> "Profiting From Customer Control" is a speech given by Kevin Krone, Southwest Airlines' VP of marketing, at the ATME 2007 conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. See the July 13, 2007, "[How Travel Marketers Are Serving 'The New Boss'](#)" report.

<sup>4</sup> Source: North American Technographics Travel Online Survey, Q2 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Forrester also looks at dimensions of technology optimism, income, and other factors to predict technology adoption. See the May 30, 2007, "[Global Technographics® Segmentation Predicts Which Consumers Will Use Technology](#)" report.

<sup>6</sup> Source: North American Technographics Travel Online Survey, Q2 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Source: "Profiting From Customer Control," a speech given by Kevin Krone, Southwest Airlines' VP of marketing, at the ATME 2007 conference in Las Vegas, Nevada.

<sup>8</sup> Digital experiences with travel companies fall short of traveler expectations. See the August 16, 2007, "[Humanizing The Digital Travel Experience](#)" report.

<sup>9</sup> When asked the degree to which they agree or disagree with the following statement, "When buying LEISURE/PERSONAL travel, I consider myself to be "brand-loyal" (that is, I prefer to do business with certain travel companies)," 10% of travelers who use travel-related widgets selected "agree completely" (5 on a five-point scale where 1=disagree completely and 5=agree completely), versus 5% of nonwidget users. Forty-six percent of travel widget users selected the top two boxes, versus 29% of nonwidget users. Source: North American Technographics Travel Online Survey, Q2 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Source: FlyerTalk Forums (<http://www.flyertalk.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-570944.html>).

<sup>11</sup> Source: FlyerTalk Forums (<http://www.flyertalk.com/forum/showthread.php?t=713189>).

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