gupshup

Why Does the Travel Industry Need Conversational AI?

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Introduction

Are you a travel agency helping people with visa appointments, travel insurance, or even booking tickets for air, rail, cruise, and hotels? If yes, then it is likely that you are flooded with queries about the documents, procedures, pricing, and a lot more. But how are customers reaching you? Do they fill in a form on your website that you would later respond to? If so, then you may not be providing the best experience to your customers. Messaging is the most preferred mode of business engagement for a modern-day customer—a trend catalyzed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Relaxation of lockdowns has led to "revenge travel" but the materialization of plans is easier said than done as different countries (or counties within a country) have different rules for travelers based on the prevailing Covid-19 situation. Informing the tourists about travel restrictions across destinations was a challenge for agencies, due to the absence of the right communication means. But not anymore, thanks to the onset of conversational AI.
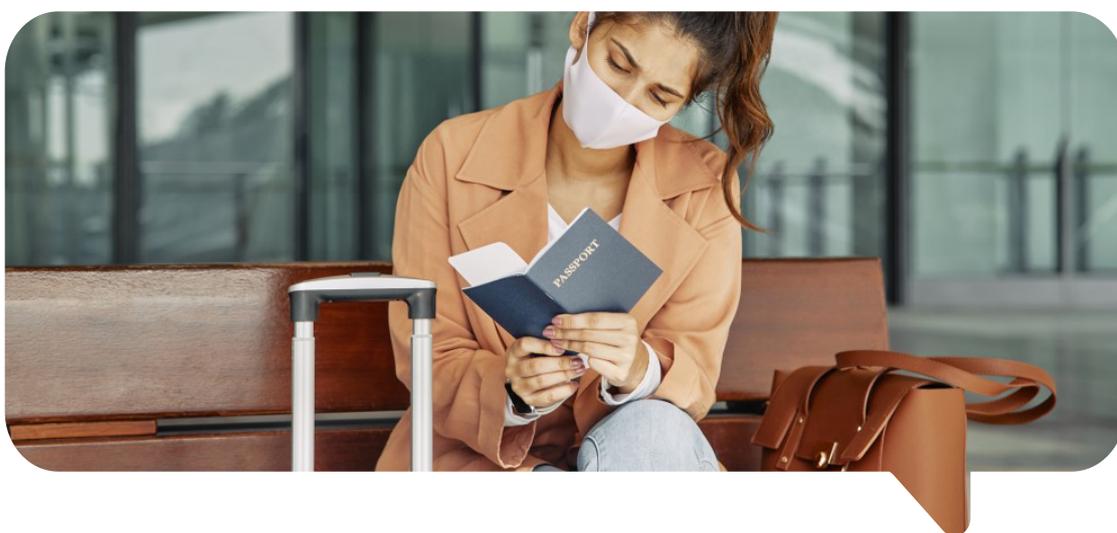
# Conversational AI for Travel Industry

In simple terms, conversational AI is the enablement of software to converse with humans in real-time. Unlike the old school SMS, it allows sharing images, documents, QR codes, making payments, suggested responses, and more. A key differentiator for conversational AI platforms is the implementation of natural language understanding and processing of voice and text to facilitate human-like interactions to develop chatbots on messaging platforms (such as WhatsApp). Chatbots are a must in today's times to conform with the changing trends. Some of the statistics indicating the worthiness of chatbots for the travel sector are:

70%
of the travelers wish to be notified through messages.

80%
seek to customize their travel requirements; naturally suggesting through a chatbot adds to the user experience.
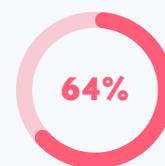
64%
of people expect real-time response from travel companies.

The various stages of chatbot usage in the travel lifecycle and the key features they must include are:

› Discover

Enable users to quickly find what they want such as trip itineraries, hotel recommendations, air, rail, or cruise tickets and so forth. Add a personal touch to the interactions.
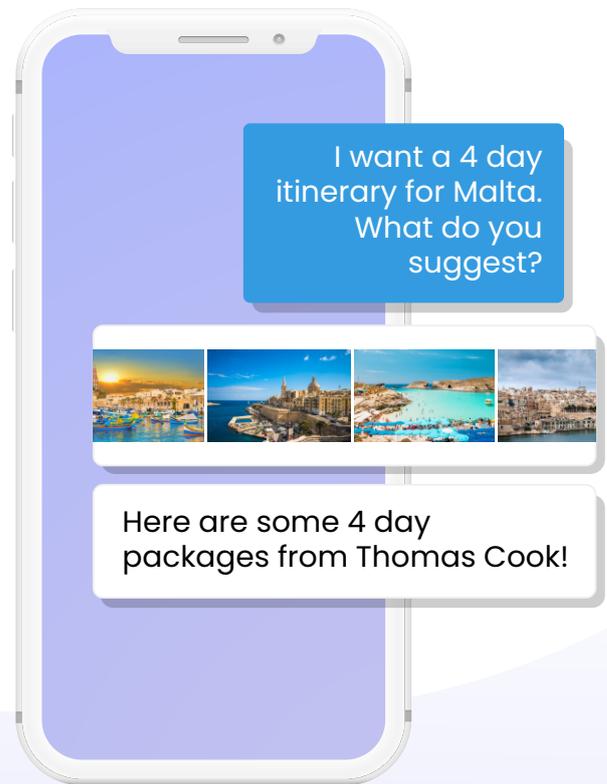

> I want a 4 day itinerary for Malta. What do you suggest?

Here are some 4 day packages from Thomas Cook!

Fig 1: Discovery Services Enabled by Chatbots

Hotel Lake Paradise

Lock in today's lowest rates and pay nothing upfront

Book Now

Later

› Book

Create easy workflows to provide faster bookings, cancellation, or rescheduling of flights, trains, cruises, or hotels; enable seamless checkouts.
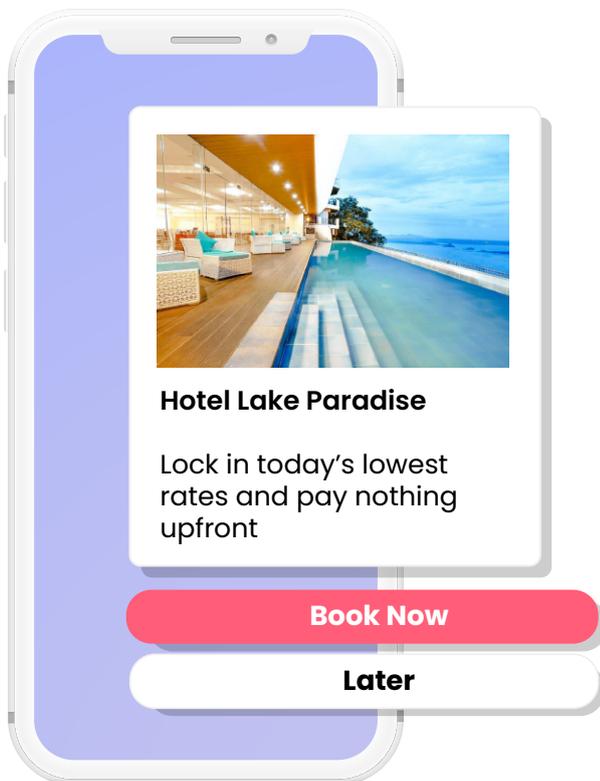
Fig 2: Booking Services Enabled on a Chatbot

› Upgrade

Upgrades to higher classes of travel or accommodation, in addition to modification of plans must be simple. Surprising customers with post-booking pleasantries can immensely improve user experience and drive brand loyalty.
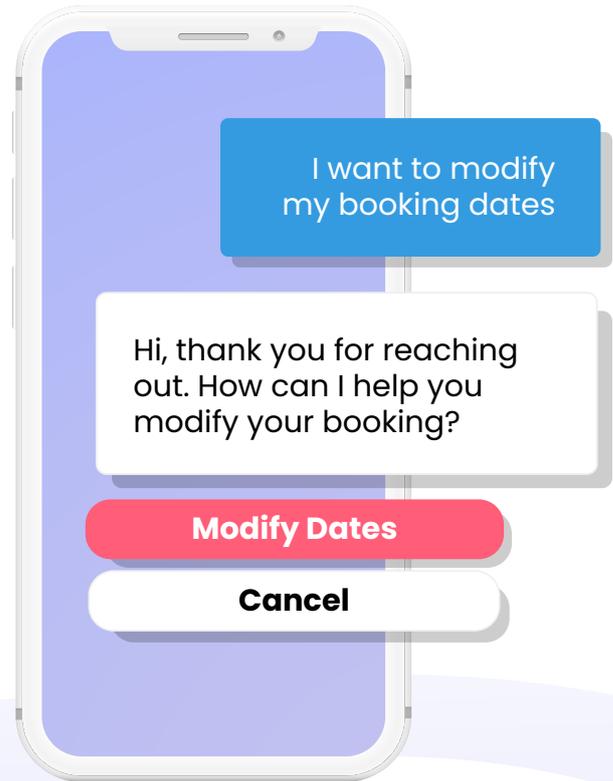
I want to modify my booking dates
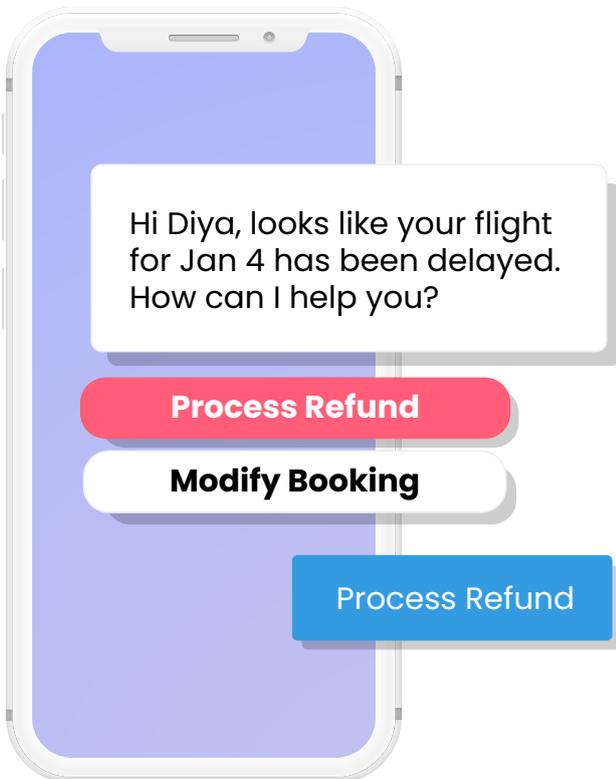
Hi, thank you for reaching out. How can I help you modify your booking?

Modify Dates

Cancel

Fig 3: Rescheduling a Travel

Hi Diya, looks like your flight for Jan 4 has been delayed. How can I help you?

Process Refund

Modify Booking

Process Refund

› Support

Real-time post-booking support offered 24/7 is critical today to foster long-term relationships with customers. Serving customers in languages of their choice can be a value addition.

Fig 4: Support Over Chatbots

› Re-engage

As chatbots provide a safe way to gather data on customer preferences, brands can leverage the same to cross-sell products and services that can improve lead conversions. Making recommendations based on customers' intent with attractive deals is a winning strategy.
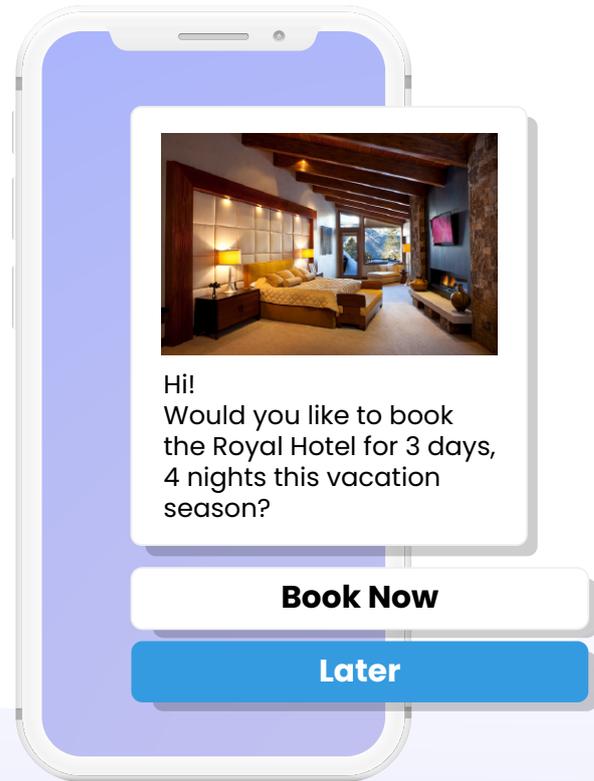
Hi!
Would you like to book the Royal Hotel for 3 days, 4 nights this vacation season?

Book Now

Later

Fig 5: Re-engaging Over Chatbots

You can now check-in for Flight VFH219 Mum - Del scheduled at 1700

Check In Now

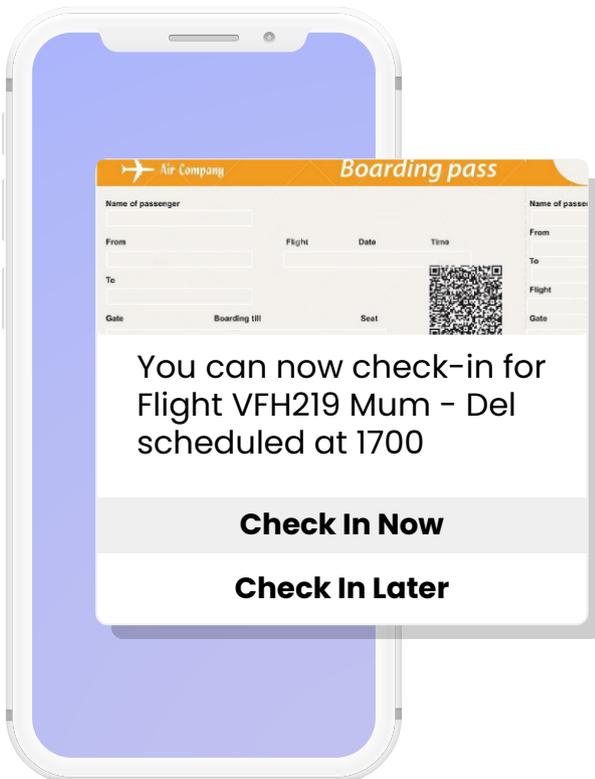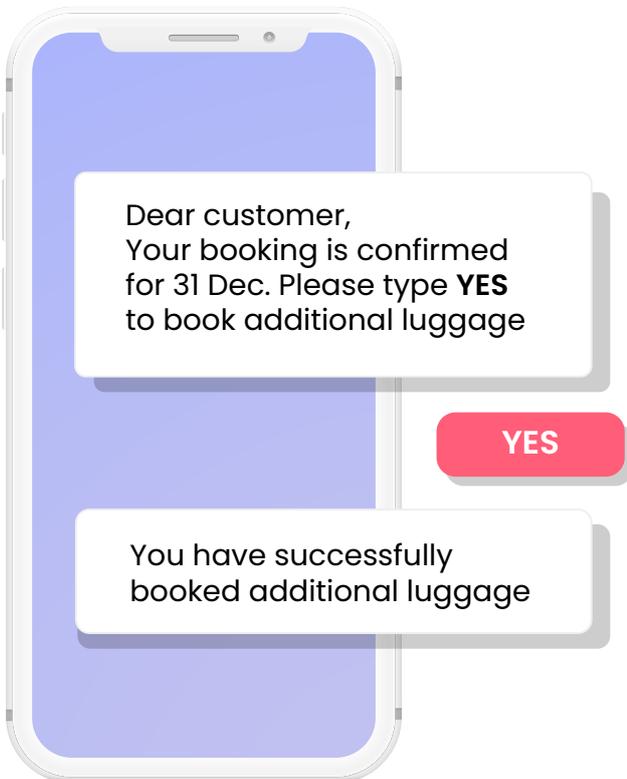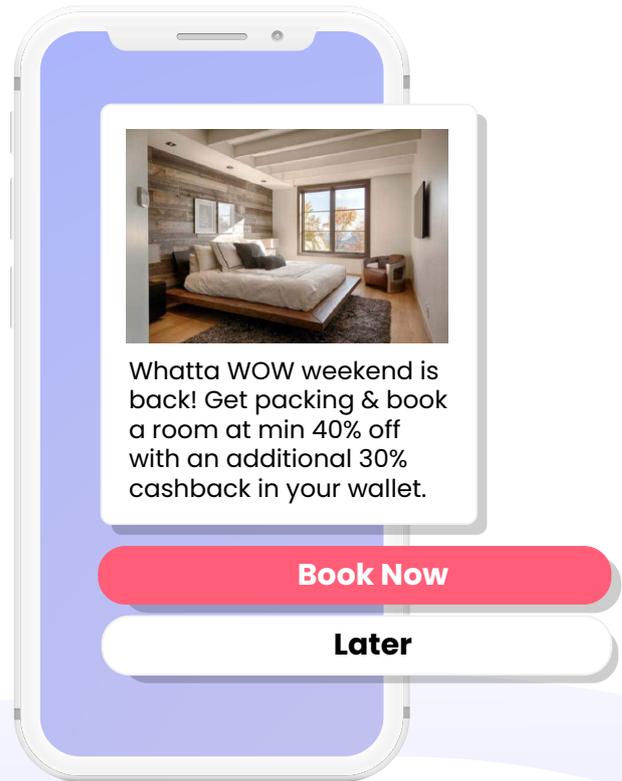**Check In Later**

› Whatsapp Checkin

Convenient web check in experience for busy customers who find it cumbersome to check in via mobile app or website.

› AI Booking assistant

Help customers to get the best possible deal from your travel platform through AI Booking assistant.

Whatta WOW weekend is back! Get packing & book a room at min 40% off with an additional 30% cashback in your wallet.

Book Now

Later

Dear customer,
Your booking is confirmed for 31 Dec. Please type **YES** to book additional luggage

YES

You have successfully booked additional luggage
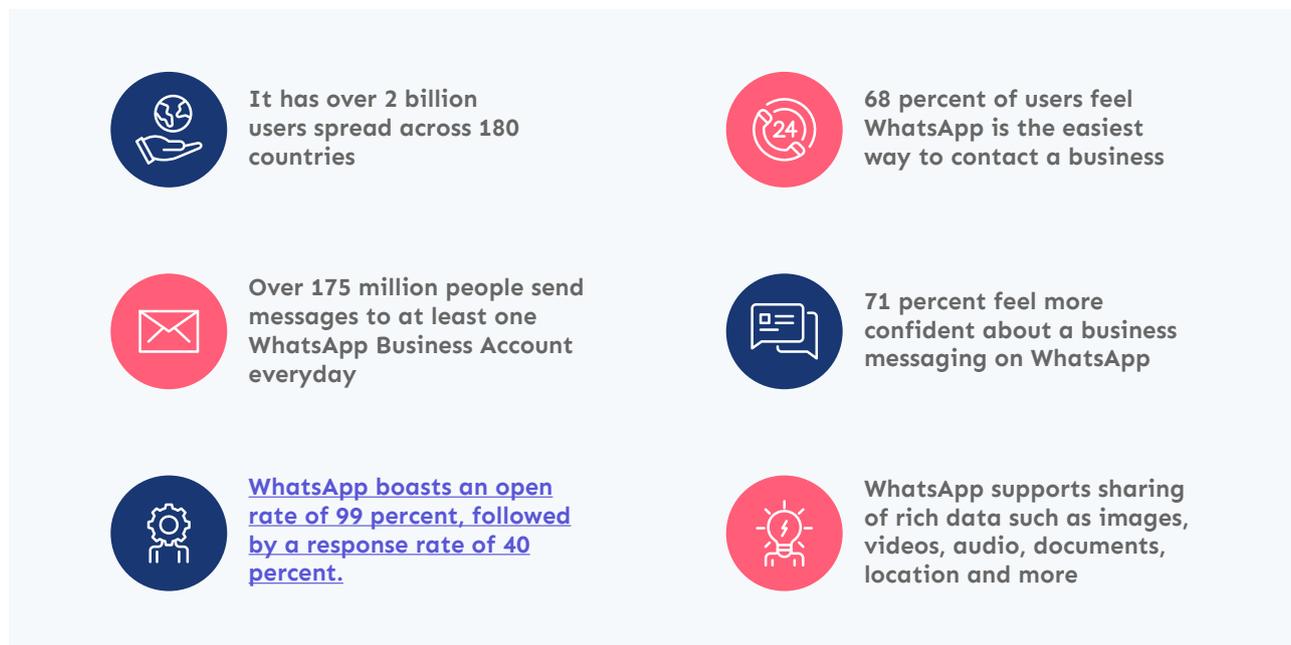
› Upgrade & book additional baggage

Upsell and cross sell to existing customers.

Messaging Platforms
for Chatbot Development

While there are several platforms available for development of chatbots, two of the most popular ones include WhatsApp and Instagram. Gupshup can also help you develop bots on other platforms such as Telegram, RCS, GBM, and more.

3.1 WhatsApp

As the third most used social network in the world today, WhatsApp emerges as a strong contender for conversational AI-enabled chatbot development because:

It has over 2 billion users spread across 180 countries

68 percent of users feel WhatsApp is the easiest way to contact a business

Over 175 million people send messages to at least one WhatsApp Business Account everyday

71 percent feel more confident about a business messaging on WhatsApp

WhatsApp boasts an open rate of 99 percent, followed by a response rate of 40 percent.

WhatsApp supports sharing of rich data such as images, videos, audio, documents, location and more

But what feature of WhatsApp can be used to create a business profile for a travel agency? It is the WhatsApp Business API, which is a part of the WhatsApp Business Platform.

3.1.1 WhatsApp Business API

The WhatsApp Business API empowers medium and large businesses to sell and interact with customers in any part of the world at scale. Businesses can leverage the API to connect with numerous chatbots and agents along with backend support systems such as the CRM, ERP, and other marketing platforms apart from websites and contact center software.

Templates can be defined to enable a variety of use cases over WhatsApp such as:

❯ Regular notifications to customers regarding a promotional offer for a trip.

❯ Information regarding sudden changes in plans due to weather or natural calamities

❯ Documents list to apply for the appropriate visas, and so forth

3.2 Instagram

Instagram has truly emerged as one of the most widely used social media platforms, with over 1 billion active monthly users, who on average spend 29 minutes a day. On an average, brands put up an average of 27.9 posts a month. Further, 50 percent of Instagram users follow at least one company. Hence a bot built on a brand's Instagram profile is bound to be an effective customer touchpoint. But how do we go about it?

3.2.1 Gupshup Instagram Messaging API

The Gupshup Instagram Messaging API is available to all business accounts and enables brands to integrate third-party apps with their Instagram Direct Messages (DMs), to automate customer responses at scale. The direct messaging (DM) feature on Instagram paves way for two-way conversations between brands and their patrons with an array of Gupshup's Instagram Messaging and conversational tools. Brands get to promote their offerings on Instagram by leveraging text, rich media, quick responses, and more to boost their sales through improved CSAT scores.

3.3 Rich Communication Services

The rich communication services (RCS), in simple terms, is an upgraded version of the SMS that supports the sharing of high-resolution photos, videos, location, group chats, read receipts, suggested replies, among several other functions. Commonly referred to as SMS 2.0, RCS uses the native messaging app (used to send and receive an SMS) of an Android phone. It is the default messaging standard for 5G networks, but functions on 3G and 4G networks as well. RCS is supported by GSMA, MEF, Google, Samsung, and major carriers such as T-Mobile, Vodafone, Orange, Telefonica, British Telecom, etc., among several others.

3.3.1 RCS Business Messaging

RCS Business Messaging (RBM) is the A2P and P2A communication through the RCS channel that allows brands and consumers to interact with each other for a richer engagement. It uses the rich and interactive features of RCS to enable branded and secure messaging.

RBM allows travel brands to build RCS chatbots, thereby enabling the sharing of high-resolution images of exotic destinations, documents, locations, and a lot more. Payment gateways can also be integrated to provide a seamless experience to the customer.

for an in-depth understanding about the features of RCS Business Messaging.

3.4 Google's Business Messages (GBM)

The word "Google" is synonymous with search. The search results—local or organic—could be an effective customer touchpoint that could be leveraged to connect the customers to their favorite brands; in essence, this is the focus of Google's Business Messages (GBM).

Majority of the customers seek to connect with the brands of their choice through chat. Extending the same idea to help customers discover their favorite brands opens a vast potential for business messaging. GBM taps into this area by enabling the chat option for the business listing of brands on Google Search results, Maps, and Google Ads. Studies reveal that online ads improve brand awareness by 80 percent and that people clicking on the ads are 50 percent more likely to make a purchase.

3.4.1 What Does GBM Do?

In simple terms, it enables the messaging option for a business listing on Google Search, Google Maps, Google Ads, and other brand owned assets such as websites, phone dialers, etc., so that users searching for keywords related to a brand or its business, have instant access to it through chat.
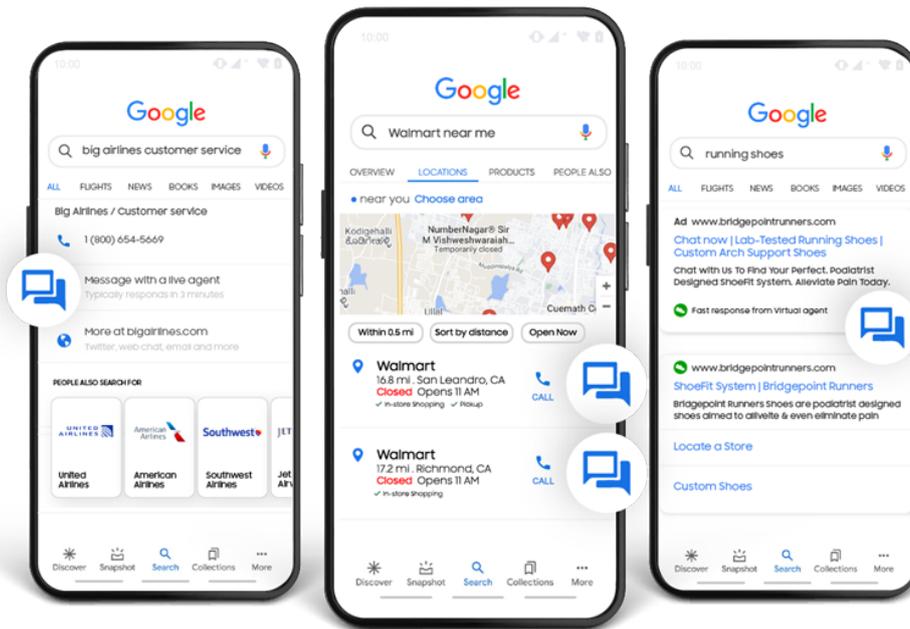

Fig 6: Illustration of GBM Screens

Travel brands can be on the top of the Google Search results, Google Ads, and Google Maps.

Customers would use the chat option on the brands' business listing on each of these channels to avail services.

Gupshup offers more than just WhatsApp, Instagram, RCS, and Google's Business Messages.

The Gupshup Advantage in Conversational AI

Gupshup's smart messaging platform allows brands to implement an omnichannel communication strategy for customers on over 30 channels including WhatsApp and Instagram using a single API. Gupshup lets you personalize customer engagement at scale with tools for building conversational AI-enabled chatbots. Three of the tools that Gupshup offers are:

No-code AI:

Brands can choose from a list of pre-built chatbot templates, customize its content and instantly publish it.

Low-code AI:

Brands can create detailed and advanced conversational chatbots using point-and-click tools.

Build a Chatbot:

Brands get to leverage the development lifecycle tools from scripting to analytics for building advanced chatbots.

The other advantages that Gupshup offers to brands are:

Seamless Custom Integrations:

Gupshup handholds brands in performing custom integrations of any tool to support business logic, user management, and more.

Enhanced Customer Engagement:

Gupshup helps brands deliver all the relevant notifications to customers to help them make appropriate decisions during purchase, such as travel recommendations, marketing promos, and upselling.

Instant and Frictionless Payments:

By integrating third-party payment gateways with WhatsApp and Instagram, Gupshup allows consumers to make payments without navigating between multiple apps.

Customers can pay from any one of the payment options available or with UPI-driven smart messaging with One-click bill pay enabling customers to make payments instantly within WhatsApp. The 1-click Bill Payments' AI algorithm fetches the payment information from message content automatically and embeds the payment link in messages. Naturally, there is no need for any additional development on the enterprise side.

Industry Examples of Travel Chatbots

The following section illustrates some of the popular chatbots in the travel industry.

5.1 KLM Royal Dutch Airlines

KLM was one of the first companies to leverage the WhatsApp Business API to develop a chatbot that could help passengers with:

> Booking Confirmations

> Boarding Passes

> Check-in Notifications

> Flight Status (such as delayed landing or take-off) etc.

In addition to WhatsApp, the KLM bot is available on other platforms such as Facebook Messenger, Twitter, and WeChat, in multiple languages. The synergy enabled by the state-of-art services, delightful user experiences, and localization to suit the linguistic needs of each country, has resulted in a high customer satisfaction index.
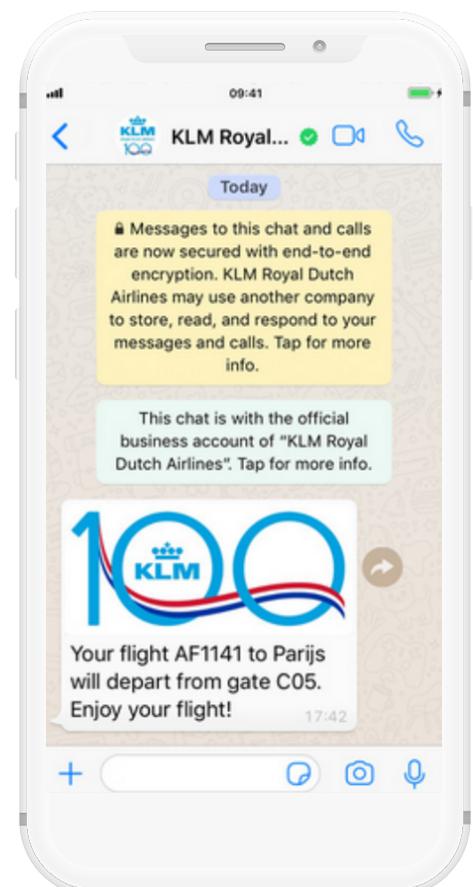

Fig 7: KLM Bot (Source)

5.2 SnapTravel

Another chatbot available on SMS, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp channels is of SnapTravel that offers deals on hotel and flight bookings to customers in destinations of their choice.
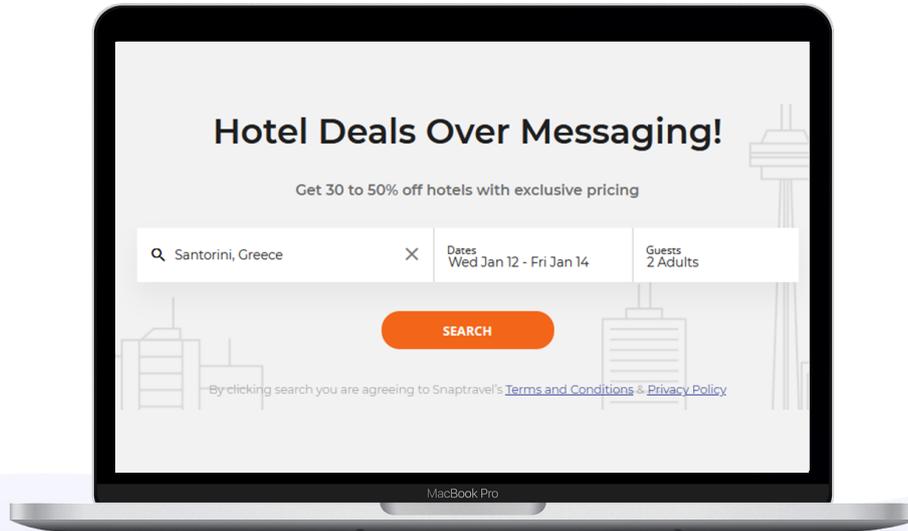

Fig 8: SnapTravel Search

Customers are initially asked to enter travel information and upon clicking Search, users are prompted to select a channel of their choice.

Once the channel is selected, a verification message containing an OTP is sent to the user's number.

Once the user enters the OTP, a URL containing the information sought by the user, is sent.
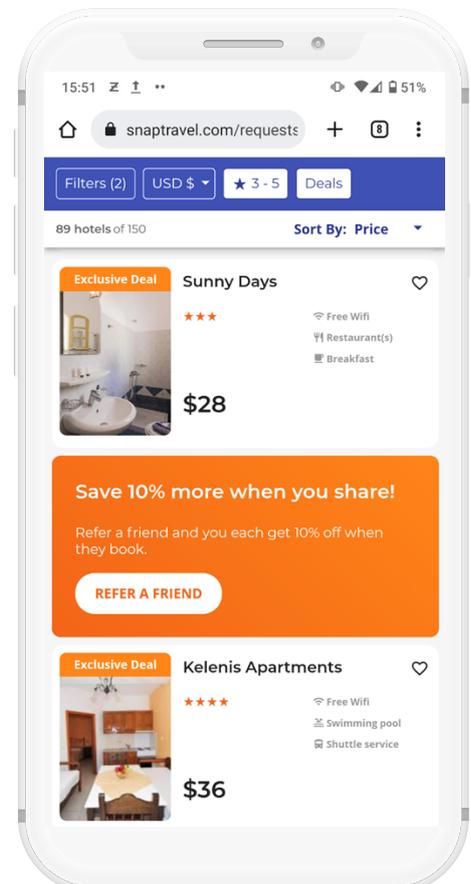

Fig 9: Best Deals Available for a User

5.3 Hipmunk

Travel planning engine Hipmunk offers a chatbot called Hello Hipmunk for comprehensive search from flights (passenger and charter), trains, hotels, and more through Airbnb and HomeAway. Available on Facebook Messenger and Slack platforms, Hipmunk has two major features—Hello Email and Hello Calendar. It is one of the most popular chatbots among the ones used
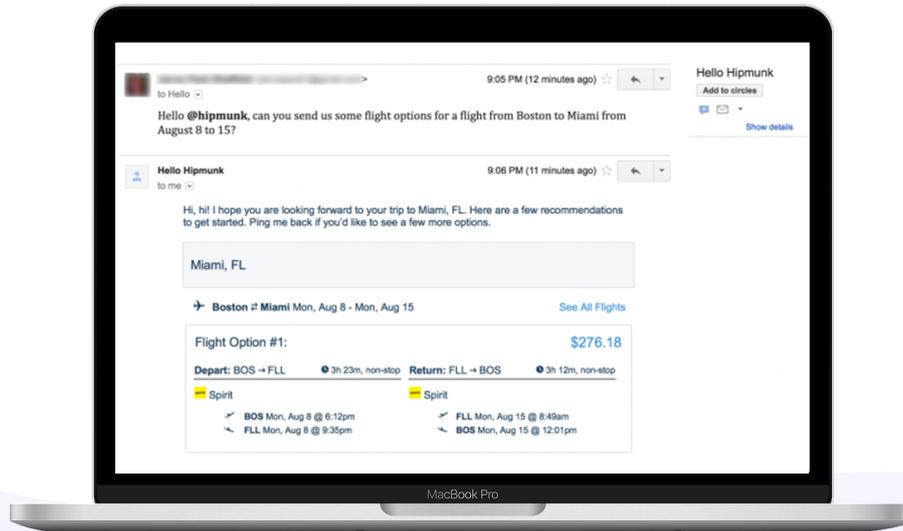

Fig 10: Hipmunk Chatbot (Source)

Hello Email allows a user to add hello@hipmunk.com into their travel-related conversations, following which they can query about flights, trains, hotels, and the like; Hipmunk replies to the email along with the search results. Hello Calendar, on the other hand, sends options pertaining to flights, car rentals, hotels etc., based on the events listed in the users' Google calendar schedule.

Conclusion

Trends in the market clearly suggest that chatbots are here to stay in the travel industry as customers find it convenient. Although there are many messenger platforms over which chatbots can be built, WhatsApp happens to be the most popular one. Being a pioneer of conversational AI, Gupshup can leverage its conversational messaging platform to help brands implement their omnichannel customer engagement strategy in over 30 channels.

You can write to Gupshup at sales@gupshup.io and we can guide you through the process and help you go live effortlessly with a state-of-the-art solution, in the shortest timelines.

If you are looking to implement a complex use case, then worry not. Discuss your requirements with Gupshup.

Contact Us and we would help you craft the best conversational commerce strategy to support you.

Sources

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> [Chatbots in Tourism Hospitality Industry](#)

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