

Moving ahead in the digital age

**Fahim Khan, Product Delivery Director,
Reed & Mackay**



Digital has completely transformed the travel business – travel is Google’s second largest income stream. Knowing about patterns, pricing and trends has really changed how travel experts operate, with Reed & Mackay having experienced the digital transformation first-hand over its 50+ year history. Fahim Khan, Product Delivery Director at premium business travel planning business Reed & Mackay talks us through the firm’s digital evolution.

We’ve been going for a long time, and during that time it has always been all about that premium service – building a personal relationship and really taking care of clients’ travel needs.

It was in 2015 that we launched our first mobile app. We felt we needed to move ahead in the digital age and compete with new entrants. Our longstanding focus on extraordinary service needed to evolve with the times.

Yet, when we launched the app, we had very little appetite for mobile booking, because our customers told us they didn’t need it. It now forms an integral part of our offering.

It quickly became clear we needed to move faster to remain at the top of our game. In 2016 we partnered with Inflexion to help us with this. They seemed an excellent fit not only because of their sector experience – they were already working with three other travel businesses – but also because of their track record in helping businesses expand internationally as well as enhancing their digital offering.

Things moved quickly after the partnership: less than six months after signing the deal, our development team participated in a ‘five-day sprint’ focussing on accelerating our mobile proposition. It was crucial to get everyone involved rather than make it the domain of a single person or team, as it meant the buy-in and genuine understanding was widespread.

Knowing the challenges that come with outsourcing development, we had wanted to do the work in-house. But Charlie at Inflexion really pushed us to proceed with a third-party specialist. Owing to our previous experience, we opted for collaboration with them rather than purely letting them run with it. Looking back, we’d probably not have our end result without their help.

Fast forward and by 2017 we were focusing on value-add services rather than just mobile support for travellers. This helped us to show the end-users what value we were truly adding. It also helped to improve engagement with our customers.

Our users have changed in a short space of time, and we had to ensure whatever we built could adapt with the changes.

The new app provides important information to travellers, such as alerts and trip safety briefings. This is increasingly important for risk-management. It also enabled us to provide intelligence to travel managers and finance teams in our client organisations, such as how much they were spending and with whom – and thus how they could save money.

Since launching our latest app, we’ve doubled users in a three-month period, which is absolutely fantastic. In the US mobile has proven more popular than desktop, with 75% of self-made bookings coming in through the app. If we could do it again, perhaps we’d have taken more time at the start to consider what we really needed. Doing it ‘too fast’ meant we ultimately lost some time and momentum.

From just two UK offices, we have expanded quickly under Inflexion’s stewardship: we are now in two US locations, Paris, Frankfurt, Sydney, Singapore and the UAE.

Our users’ needs changed in a short space of time, and we had to ensure whatever we built could adapt with these changes. We’ve always been a high-touch company. But with an enhanced digital offering, we are able to engage with our client in a more effective way.

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