

Are travel planning apps threatened by Google Trips?

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While apps that help users create personalized guides have unique features, none compares to Google Trips regarding reach, content, and user-base.

Tript, Minube, Stay.com, TripAdvisor Offline City Guides, and many other apps that help users create personalized guides may face serious competition with the release of **Google Trips**, by many definitions a game-changer in the industry. While each of the entities above has unique features that make them the app of choice for travelers around the world, none compares to Google Trips regarding reach, content, and user-base.

Granted the Google Trips user-base is hard to define. Some people will find themselves using the app for convenience, to have their bookings and confirmation numbers at hand, albeit direct bookings from the app are not yet possible and Google made no comment regarding its possible involvement in the online booking game. Instead, according to **Misha Plotkine** from MobyTrip (<https://mobytrip.com/>), Google only wants "to be a connector between travel brands and customers." This was based on a Google presentation at the Skift Global Forum (<https://skift.com/2016/09/28/google-exec-says-master-plan-in-travel-is-more-connector-than-booker/>) after the search giant launched Allo. Even back then it was clear Google Trips was part of the larger picture.

After all, this is Google we are talking about. It is unwise to disregard the possibility that Trips is a game changer. It is also safe to assume that other users will find the app preinstalled on their Android phones – yet another "pushed" service in a cluster of the supposedly useful set of Google tools that currently includes Chrome, Maps, Voice Search, Drive, Play Store, and the like.

It is also true that Google Trips is not the first app to offer downloadable information that works offline, but not many users will bother to search for alternatives. Considering that Google controls search too, where would these users find the said options when the search giant will always prioritize its products against the competition?

Industry experts have spoken. **Melanie Hess** of **SutherlandGold Group** on behalf of Mezi (<http://mezi.com/>) personal assistant for shopping and travel told us that "Google Trips is currently a jack of all trades, yet master of none technology and while it has the potential to integrate with other platforms to offer more services, it is not there yet. For example -- you still have to leave Google trips to book or make purchases." Hess underlined that "Mezi's users trust the app to book

flights and make hotel recommendations.”

Bookings and pre-trip planning are the concern of **Norman Brauns**, CEO and founder of PACIFIC (<http://www.meetpacific.com/>) too:

“The greatest potential for Google Trips is for in-trip use—that day you wake up without a plan and wonder what to do next. You can line it all up in Google Trips and download for offline access. However, for pre-trip planning, consumers might not want to trade a seamless experience for being stuck in a walled garden. If I have got time to figure out where I want to eat on my next vacation, I’m not going to open up Trips; I am going to Yelp, TripAdvisor, or my favorite chef’s Twitter account. If I go to Google at all, it will be to use the search engine.”

This behavior is symptomatic of what most users would do and a drawback of Google Trips as of this moment. However, things will change. Travel is a big game and the logical choice for Google on mobile when the search takes place on so many other “routes” including third party travel apps, and ad-serving apps like Facebook, which has a strong footprint in travel too.

Katie Hammel, Content Marketing Manager of Desktop travel planning startup TripCreator (<https://tripcreator.com/>) is focused on the booking matter too:

“Google Trips does not support reservations. Users need to have their flights and hotels booked already so that the info can be added to the app. Users still have to do the legwork in advance; the app does not help the user find hotels in the destination.”

Hammel’s last observation is accurate, but not telling of Google’s real intentions. Google may choose to allow users to find hotels within the app in the near future. It already suggests places to eat. The app is still in infancy and Google has the resources to develop it fast. In fact, Google’s declared mission is to provide the best tools for its users. It is erroneous to say that Google Trips relies only on user-generated content. Yes, it does, but it also builds on years of perfected search algorithms, and on user feedback. This company is smart enough to appear to ignore criticism when, in fact, working behind the scenes to crush the competition.

On to the bigger picture,

Sygyic Travel (<https://travel.sygyic.com/#/?map=4,37.99616,23.73047&type=poi&wizard>) representative **Barbora Nevosadova** sees Google Trips not as competition, but as an educational tool:

“We welcome Google Trips as we hope it will open the overall market for travel planning apps. At the moment most of the travel planning apps struggle to get the attention of travelers who are not aware of the possibility to download an app for travel planning. We hope that Google will educate the market and travelers will try out other apps as well.”

This is an interesting observation denoting how small players look at the Big Kahuna of the industry. Many companies – and I am not talking about Sygyic Travel, but in general terms – develop apps to sell for significant amounts to the highest bidders, and Google has a history of buying innovation to support its products. Competing with Google is cumbersome given the company’s power on the Web. Google also controls what apps are shown first in PlayStore – “based on users’ searches” – and this is complicating matters more.

Even if they innovate and adapt, even when they are ahead of the curb, small players often get crushed. There are many examples to support this affirmation – just take a look at the industry dead pool: Desti and Wander come to mind, but how many are there still there yet unknown? PR and search matter and Google controls the vertical.

However, Google Trips is a good thing for destinations. Take it from **Sergio Barros**, Director of Sales for the Tenerife Bureau of Tourism (<http://www.todotenerife.es/en/>):

"Google Trips is a great tool for travelers! Moreover, because of the Google brand, it will be as popular, if not better liked than other online travel aids like TripIt, TouristEye, and TripAdvisor. Google is always at the forefront of new technology, and I think other travel sites will soon follow suit with their version. Google Trips will be a great tool for those travelers visiting Tenerife since there are so many activities, hotel, restaurants, and options on the island. Its offline feature will be extremely helpful in more remote locations on the island or our neighboring island La Gomera."

Conclusions are not difficult to draw in this case, but they are contrasting. If you are the provider of a travel planning app, here's the PR pro telling you that it is naïve to believe that Google Trips is not a threat. It should be the Boogeyman under your beds. Google does not need the effort to generate the unique content they demand from you for SEO purposes. Google will USE your unique content against you. However, what can you do? Satisfy the search masters, or get out of the game! These are your only options if you cannot afford to beat them.

However, if you are a hospitality provider, your unique content will offer you an advantage. Ideally, the description you provide for your Google My Business listing is original, compelling, and revealing, but who masters the art of writing business descriptions for Google without the help of an SEO?

If you are a user, Google Trips will use your private Gmail data to make available and to organize automatically travel details like reservations and confirmation numbers. Popular attractions or proximity attraction based on location will be available too. You will also find restaurants, and you can make a trip plan to download and use offline.

I have to repeat this: Google Trips is in its infancy, but it is a game changer, only because it challenges innovation at this point. It threatens small business development and major players will have to push their PR, social media, and tech efforts to remain relevant. The answer to the title question is a loud "yes." Google Trips is a threat to other apps, less the likes of TripAdvisor let's say, whose user base is committed and brand-aware. The rest of the apps will have to find inventive ways to stay in the game, beyond coding, in front of social media users, and capitalize on PR.