

How Travelstart uses trip notifications to build lasting customer relationships

Africa's largest online travel agency partnered with Amadeus Hey! to drive post-booking engagement and transform one-time bookers into loyal customers.



Introduction

For online travel agencies (OTAs), building lasting customer relationships is both crucial and complex.

With most travelers booking just a few trips per year, agencies find themselves in a costly cycle of acquiring and re-acquiring customers through expensive digital channels.

Travelstart, Africa's largest OTA, saw an opportunity to drive engagement and retention by using Amadeus Hey! to power real-time trip notifications and keep their customers better informed throughout the journey.

In doing so, they created not only a profitable ancillary service, but also a strategic asset that could help reduce dependency on paid channels and strengthen customer relationships across their entire business.



About Travelstart

Travelstart is Africa's leading online travel agency, helping business and leisure travelers search, compare and book the best flights, hotels, holiday packages, rental cars, and activities all in one place.

Operating in eight countries across Africa and the Middle East, Travelstart is the mother brand within the TravelLab Group, Africa's leading travel and fintech technology group.

Online travel's paid acquisition dilemma

For OTAs, the battle for visibility is expensive. Each booking comes at a cost.

Agencies must outbid competitors on search engines, cut prices to rank in metasearch results, and spend heavily to stay visible online. What's more, even when customers are satisfied, they often return to these same expensive channels for their next trip, forcing agencies to compete – and spend – to reacquire them.

Andy Hedley, Managing Director of Travelstart's parent company, the Travellab Group, knows this cost firsthand: "There are a lot of people that would go to Google even if they were looking for Travelstart and click the sponsored link at the top," he explains. "You're paying every time."

With most of Travelstart's customers booking just 2-3 trips per year – 70% of which are domestic – driving app adoption has become central to their customer retention strategy. "There are obvious savings to be made by pushing the app," Andy points out, "particularly in travel, which, for many people, is an infrequent purchase."

The key challenge, he adds, is giving customers a compelling reason to come back: "it's trying to find ways to promote more engagement as well as to drive value."



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Andy Hedley
Managing director,
Travellab Group

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Andy Hedley
Managing director, TravelLab Group

Travelstart noticed trends among its South African users

2.5

Avg. trips per year

70%

Domestic travel

Creating value through trip notifications

Travelstart saw an opportunity to drive engagement by being the first in their market to offer airline-quality flight notifications.

To deliver this experience, Travelstart turned to Amadeus Hey!, a traveler engagement solution that provides targeted service recommendations and real-time updates including flight status, check-in times, and gate changes.

What made Amadeus Hey! particularly appealing was its ability to handle bookings from different sources and global distribution systems (GDS). "What tipped the scale was that it's supplier-agnostic: one solution that you can use across multiple suppliers in multiple scenarios," Andy explains.

Amadeus Hey! and Travelstart collaborated closely on the implementation, designing a solution that would serve not just Travelstart but also the TravelLab Group, whose brands also serve business travelers and a network of independent travel advisors. A single API integration

could power notifications across all brands and communication channels, making it an ideal foundation for future expansion.

To test customer interest and ensure a rapid return on investment, Travelstart rolled out Amadeus Hey! as a paid ancillary in their booking funnel. Branded as My Trip Alerts, the service offered travelers the option to purchase trip notifications delivered to their preferred device.

But would travelers find enough value in trip notifications to pay for them?

To find out, Travelstart began a strategic rollout of My Trip Alerts, launching first in their South African home market before expanding to Nigeria.

Add-Ons



My Trip Alerts to SMS and EMAIL POPULAR

Stay informed throughout your journey with My Trip Alerts. Get personalised travel updates such as check-in reminders, flight updates, and weather alerts. Receive notifications directly to your SMS and email. [Know more](#)

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Customers embrace My Trip Alerts

The results exceeded expectations: 11.5% of customers chose to buy My Trip Alerts, with the attachment rate rising to 17% for international flights.

After experimenting with different price points, Travelstart found a sweet spot that drove impressive attachment rates while allowing healthy profit margins.

Engagement metrics told an even more compelling story. High push notification and email open rates showed that travelers weren't just willing to pay for trip notifications,

but that they were actively consuming them throughout their journey.

The results revealed more than a profitable ancillary: they showed a valuable tool that Travelstart could use to drive engagement and retention across their entire business.

Results

11.5%

Overall
attachment rate

17%

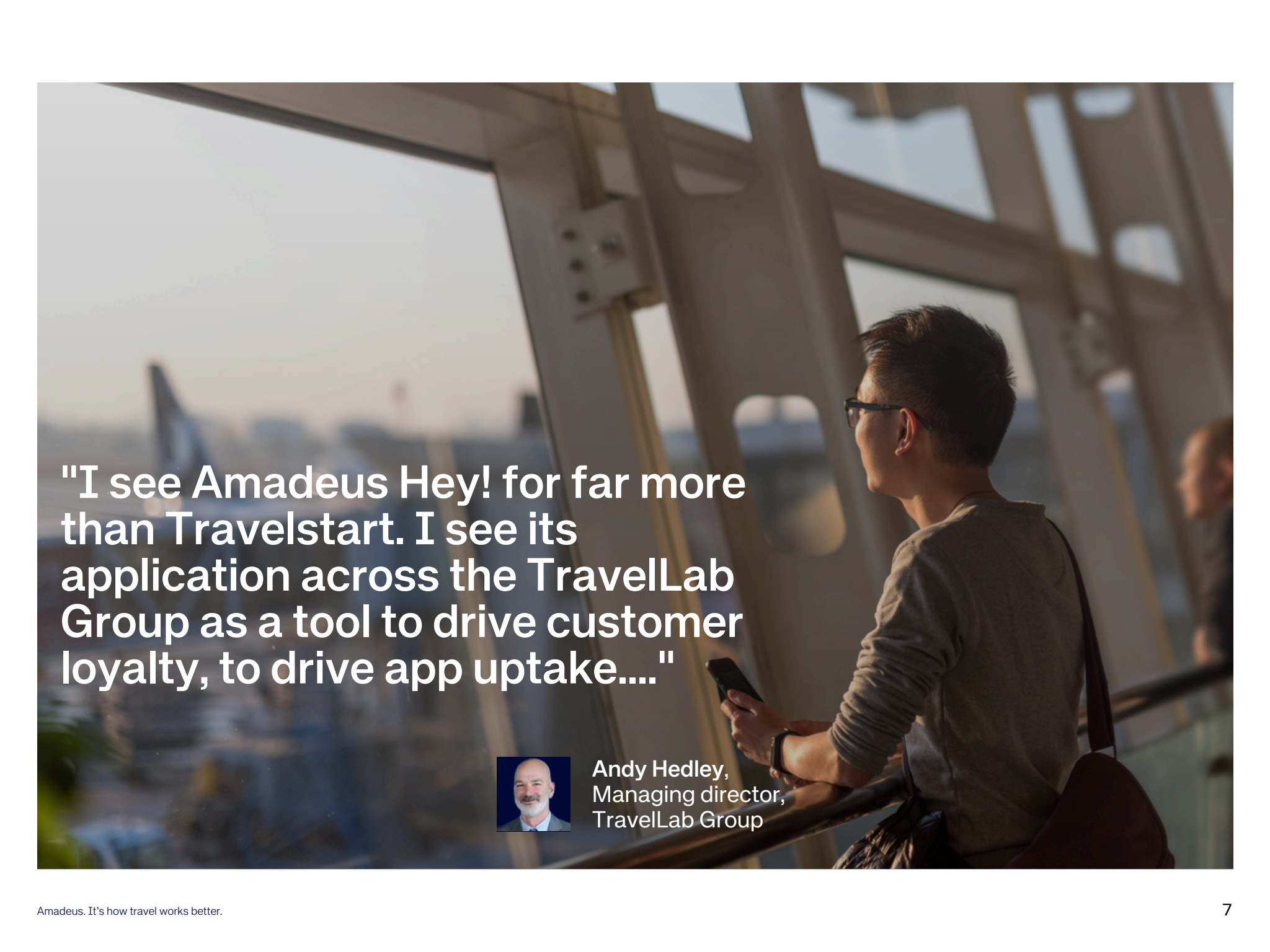
Attachment rate
intl. flights -

70%

Push notification
open rate

50%

Email
open rate

A man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, is seen from the side, looking out of a large window. He is holding a black smartphone in his right hand. The window has a metal frame, and the view outside shows a city skyline with a prominent tower under a hazy sky. The lighting suggests it's either early morning or late afternoon.

"I see Amadeus Hey! for far more than Travelstart. I see its application across the Travellab Group as a tool to drive customer loyalty, to drive app uptake...."



Andy Hedley,
Managing director,
Travellab Group

Scaling success across the business

While Amadeus Hey! succeeded as an ancillary service, Travelstart recognized its broader potential to create value across the TravelLab Group's brand portfolio.

As a next step, Travelstart will use Amadeus Hey! to drive app adoption, a key element in their wider strategy to tackle customer acquisition costs. By making trip notifications free for app users while keeping them as a paid service on desktop, Travelstart plans to create a natural incentive for customers to use their direct channels.

However, the value of trip notifications extends beyond app users. The Travel Lab Group plans to make Amadeus

Hey! available to its consortium members to enhance their customers' experience, while also offering it as a value-added feature in its partnerships with 3rd-party user groups. "I don't want to be commoditized as a travel provider purely for providing content and inventory," Andy notes. "Giving partners additional enhanced value makes the whole proposition more sticky."



This strategy keeps Travelstart ahead of evolving customer expectations while reducing dependency on paid channels. What started as a paid notification service has evolved into something more valuable: a cornerstone of customer engagement across the entire business.

Key takeaways

1

Stand out by providing value-added services

In a market dominated by price competition, value-added services like trip notifications help OTAs stand out and build lasting customer relationships.

2

Travelers want real-time updates

An 11.5% attachment rate shows travelers value trip notifications. The higher rate for international flights (17%) shows this value increases with cost and complexity of the trip.

3

Look past immediate returns

Value-added services can generate quick returns as ancillaries, but their strategic value often extends far beyond direct revenue.

4

Value transfers across different customer segments

The same service that delights direct customers can strengthen B2B partnerships and add value to loyalty programs.

Ready to turn one-time bookers into returning customers? Learn more about Amadeus Hey!



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