Webinar: AI Demystified

WTTC's latest webinar brought together industry experts to discuss the applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Travel & Tourism sector. With insights from top leaders and innovators, the event shed light on the untapped opportunities for AI to revolutionise travel experiences and operations.

James McDonald, Director of Travel Transformation at the World Travel & Tourism Council, walked us through the roots of AI models such as Chat GPT and discussed the growing need for businesses to adapt to AI technologies. He highlighted Coca Cola's use of AI for their marketing campaigns and in company operations as a business case to learn from. He detailed WTTC's 4-part series on AI which is now available for download on WTTC's Research Hub. He was then joined by two AI-generated speakers who shared more detail on the first two reports.

Julie Shainock, Managing Director of Travel, Transport, & Logistics at Microsoft, outlined the transformative impact of models such as Azure Open AI and how these have positively impacted different Travel & Tourism companies. She shared how Virgin Atlantic uses it to create personalised guest experiences and American Airlines uses it to enhance workforce capabilities. She also showcased that Microsoft Copilot users we reporting significant time saving and improved productivity, among many benefits. Furthermore, Julie emphasised the evolving role of AI – from machine learning to generative AI. She explained that there is a critical need for mature data in Travel & Tourism to help maximise AI's potential for the sector.

Gabriele Mazzini, Team Leader of the Artificial Intelligence Act at the European Commission, discussed the EU's risk-based approach to AI regulation, permitting low-risk applications with transparency obligations while prohibiting practices involving deceptive techniques and exploitation of vulnerable groups. He also outlined the strict compliance procedures for high-risk applications and the transparency obligations for certain AI, such as notifying the public that they are interacting with AI or generated images.

Both Gabriele and Julie then joined a panel discussion with Amadeus and Accenture, moderated by James McDonald.

In the panel discussion **Rodrigo Acuna Agost, Director of Research and GenAI Centre of Excellence at Amadeus,** walked us through Amadeus' new Centre of Excellence and its current operations into AI. The Centre focuses on creating a strong foundation and remaining abreast of emerging technology trends. Emphasising a top-down approach, the mandate of the centre is to accelerate the execution of Generative AI initiatives through its service-oriented AI academy, accessible to both engineer and business colleagues.

Michael Robinson, Managing Director of Travel Innovation & Ecosystems Lead at Accenture discussed Accenture's role as one of the world's largest system integrators, emphasising the pivotal role of the cloud, data, and AI in driving differentiation for clients. He underscored AI's significance in travel operations, particularly in enhancing visibility and enabling generative AI applications across various domains of the travel experience. Michael advocated for personalised, multi-modal experiences for consumers, beyond traditional AI bots.

Top 5 Learnings

1. **AI has strategic importance**. AI has become a focal topic of boardrooms globally, with many businesses seeking different ways to apply it to their operations to enhance business outcomes.

2. **There are diverse applications of AI.** AI applications span various domains such as product development, workforce empowerment, sustainability, and operational efficiency.
3. **There is a need to balance opportunities with risks.** While AI offers significant opportunities, it also introduces risks that must be managed effectively. Understanding and addressing these risks, including responsible AI frameworks, regulatory compliance, and voluntary governance measures, is crucial for responsible adoption.
4. **AI has transformative potential in Travel & Tourism.** The Travel & Tourism sector stands to benefit significantly from AI's capabilities. AI is already being used for predictive insights, personalised services, and operational efficiencies, among other use cases. However, realising these benefits requires a mature data infrastructure and attention to data quality and governance.
5. **Businesses need to understand the regulatory landscape and ethical considerations.** Increasingly, regulatory frameworks aimed at addressing risks and ensuring ethical AI practices are being created. Many will come into force in the near future. Companies must familiarise themselves with regulatory requirements, particularly concerning high-risk AI applications, and align their strategies and systems accordingly.