

AIRLINE EXECUTIVE GUIDE

The essential guide to digital readiness for the air travel rebound

With stories from digital leaders at Alaska Airlines, United Airlines, and more

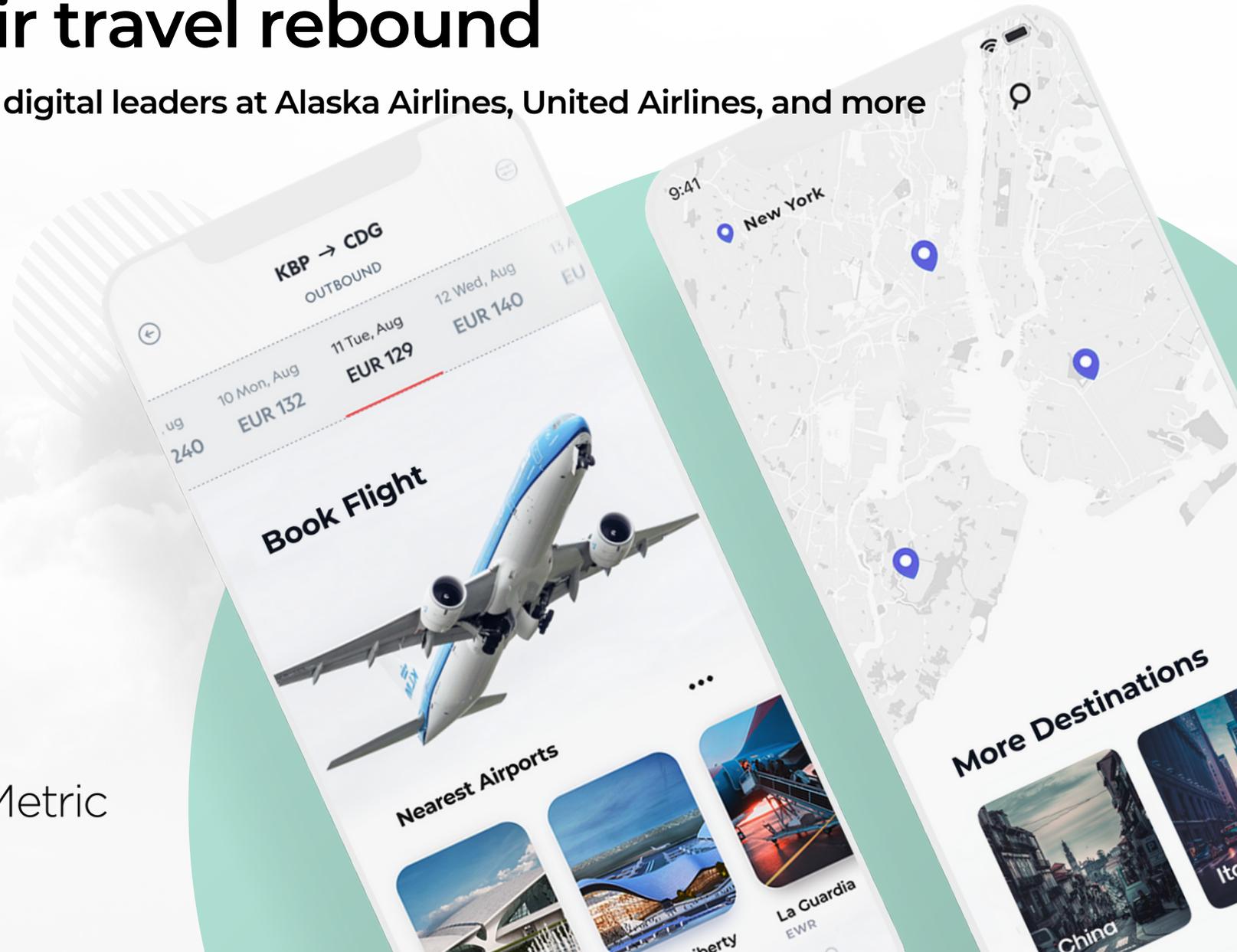


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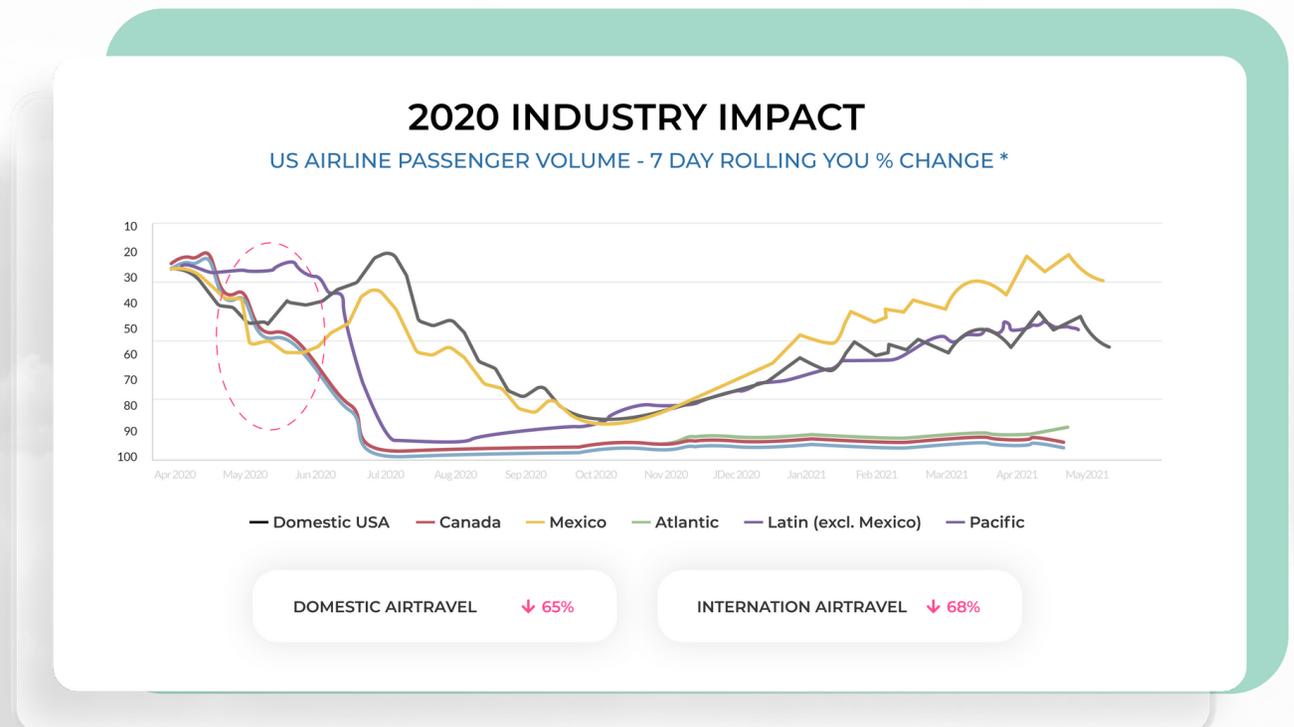
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Airlines are more eager than ever to move past the turbulence

It's been a bumpy year for the travel industry. Digital was no exception. Whatever digital transformation strategies were born in January 2020 were turned upside down by the end of March.

In an unprecedented decline, digital traffic and bookings plummeted across every major supplier (mobile and web). Overnight, digital leaders and product managers were forced to pivot. Many companies doubled down on flexible travel options, contactless check-in, and mobile-first strategies.



Passenger volumes plummeted as the pandemic began.

Cautious optimism: preparing for takeoff

Today, as vaccines roll out, air travel is entering a new phase of recovery, from survival to revival. Travelers are feeling confident again— and with the pent up demand, there has been a noticeable uptick in new booking activity. According to Jessi Lewis, eCommerce Manager for Technical Product Delivery at Alaska Airlines, this includes a surge in using trip credits from last year's cancelled bookings, as credits expire and people make summer plans.



We're feeling very optimistic about summer travel and even holiday.



JESSI LEWIS

eCommerce Manager, Technical Product Delivery
Alaska Airlines

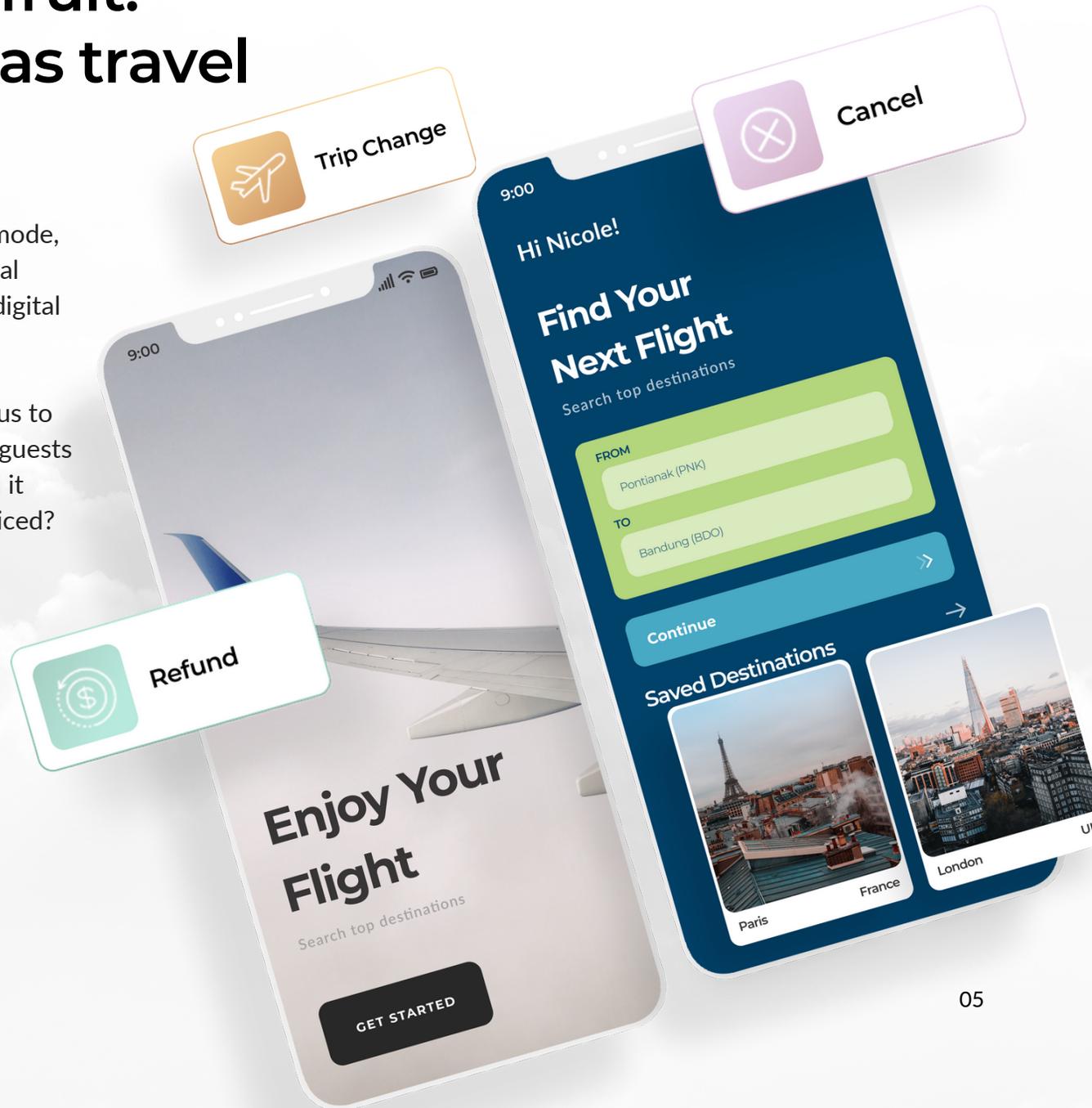
To gather insights, we pulled benchmark data and surveyed digital leaders at some of the preeminent airline carriers to find out what they're expecting over the coming months. We asked questions like:

- What are they doing to prepare for the influx in traffic, bookings, and customers on digital?
- What technology and operational improvements are expected to minimize friction and improve safety as passengers get back on flights?

The low-hanging fruit: minimize friction as travel demand surges

For over a year, airlines have been in survival mode, focused on minimizing churn and nurturing loyal customers, who are mostly familiar with their digital experiences.

But new and less familiar consumers are anxious to splurge on travel again. When these would be guests engage and overwhelm digital platforms, could it amplify any friction that may have gone unnoticed?



Rising traffic and frustration

Across our benchmark of travel and hospitality digital platforms,* there's been a recent uptick in digital frustration for consumers as more people rush to make travel plans online. After a decline during the pandemic, so-called 'rage click' and 'possible frustration' activity appears to be on the comeback. This means not just more customers – but potentially more frustrated customers.

Travel forecast: Digital traffic will surge – so will rage clicks*

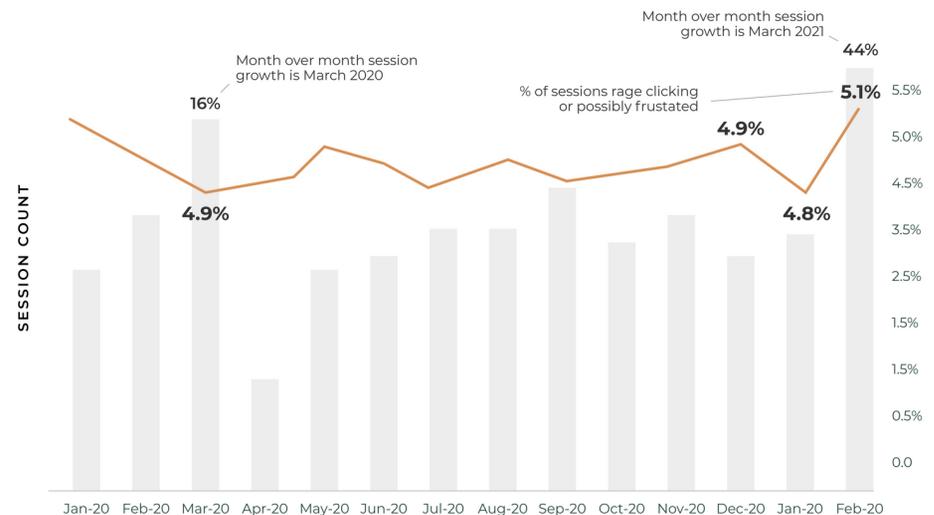
Across travel & hospitality brands, digital traffic surged 44% in March 2021 compared to only 16% growth during the same period in 2020.

At the same time, the percentage of traffic rage clicking or possibly frustrated also increased YoY from 4.9% in Mar 2020 to 5.1% in Mar 2021, also jumping month over month compared to a decline during the same month last year.

Identity customer friction faster

Quantum Metric provides out of the box struggle indicators, such as rage clicking, possible frustration and long spinners (i.e. slow load times), which can alert you in real-time when a customer may be experiencing difficulty anywhere on your site or mobile app.

The chart to the right shows total monthly sessions across travel and hospitality brands. The orange line represents the average share of sessions that are rage clicking or possibly frustrated, which has steadily increased since July 2020.



*Methodology: The benchmark data presented above is based on anonymous and aggregated browsing information across multiple Travel & Hospitality sector sites and native apps (including airlines, hotels and car rental brands) collected via the Quantum Metric platform from Jan 2020 through March 2021. For more information on these findings, contact Tom Arundel, Director of Product Marketing at Quantum Metric at tarundel@quantummetric.com.

The quick pivot: identify the highest value business opportunities faster

At the start of the pandemic, teams had to pivot fast and focus on the business opportunities that drove the most bookings and cost savings.

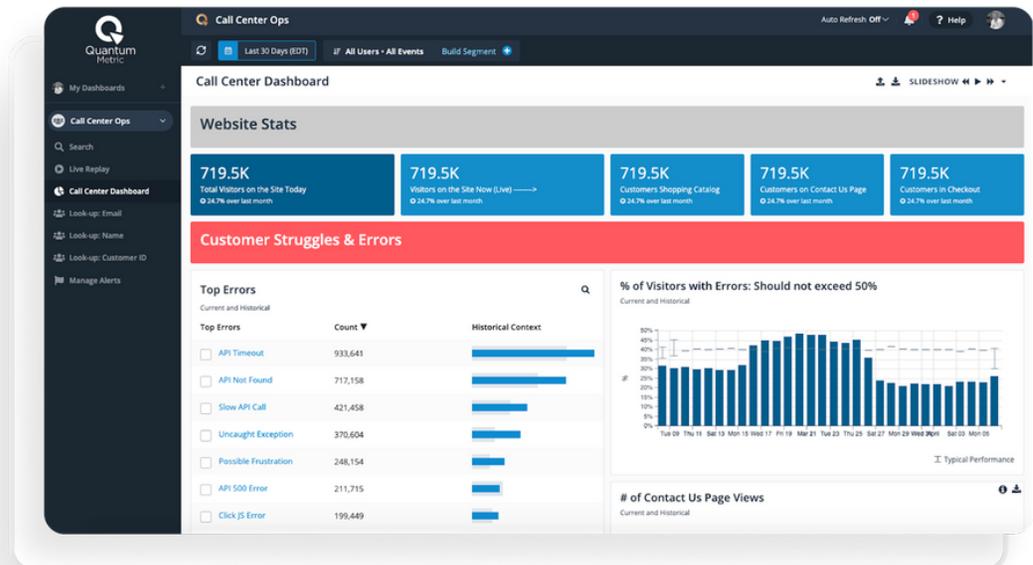
Director of Shop, Buy and Ancillary Product Management at a top five global airlines said "customer behaviors changed overnight and teams had to build, test, learn and iterate at speed in order to survive."

Disruption Leads to Transformation

As customers raced to cancel travel plans at the start of the pandemic, trip cancellations reached record levels. Many airlines responded quickly with trip credits and more flexible cancellation policies. But to reduce the heavy burden on overwhelmed call centers, they needed to enable self-service features for faster customer service.

"We started seeing millions and millions of tickets being cancelled over a very short time. Initially, customers were picking up the phone and calling reservations to ask how to redeem their airline credits. So we realized we actually did not have a self-serve mechanism for these customers to come back and re-book their tickets."

Using Quantum Metric, this airlines was able to get real-time feedback that led them to build a self-service online tool for trip credits, which has eased the burden on call center teams.



Identifying customer struggle faster

This airlines director said that before Quantum Metric, his teams previously had limited insight into the digital experience.

“We are now able to see what the customer is seeing and actually emphasize and feel their pain a lot better,” he said. “And this drives the teams to react to it much, much faster. And our turnaround time on fixing issues is much quicker.”

He said the concept of rage clicks was alien before, but now they can see when a customer is just hovering over a radio button they'd recently launched, or unsuccessfully clicking on something.



“ In your head, you thought that this thing works. But then you realize that the customer is not able to figure this out. And the end result is that they abandoned what they were trying to do. That learning is valuable.

Product Management, **Top 5 Global Airlines**

Future of digital: re-building confidence in travel

For this global airlines, the focus in 2021 will be on keeping the momentum going from the past year. His team will continue learning and evolving their customer-first approach.

“That’s where a platform like Quantum Metric really came in handy. Where we could push functionality out and get real-time customer feedback to see if our hypothesis was working or not.”

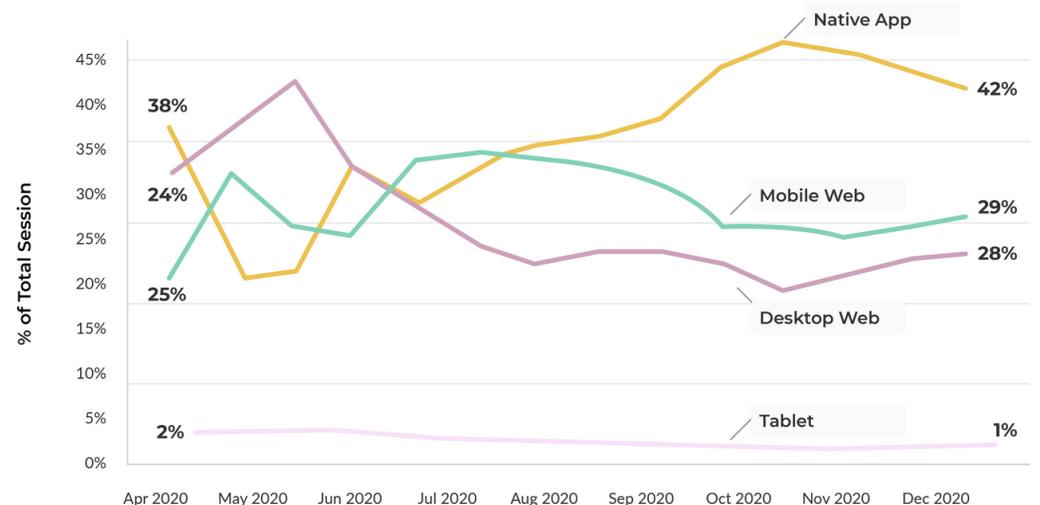
“It’s great to have a hypothesis and often we think we know what the customer wants, but do we really?”

Mobile usage climbs higher*

As companies ramped up safety measures by driving customers to contactless, one of the biggest trends has been the acceleration of mobile. And mobile growth is probably here to stay.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, native app usage has increased its share from 31% to 43% of total traffic across benchmark airline sites. This happened as the traffic share on other device types, such as desktop, declined.

Native apps grow share of total airline digital traffic



*Methodology: Benchmark data above based on anonymous and aggregated browsing information across multiple Travel & Hospitality sites and native apps (including airlines, hotels and car rental brands) collected via the Quantum Metric platform from Jan 2020 through Mar 2021.

Using Continuous Product Design to iterate in real-time

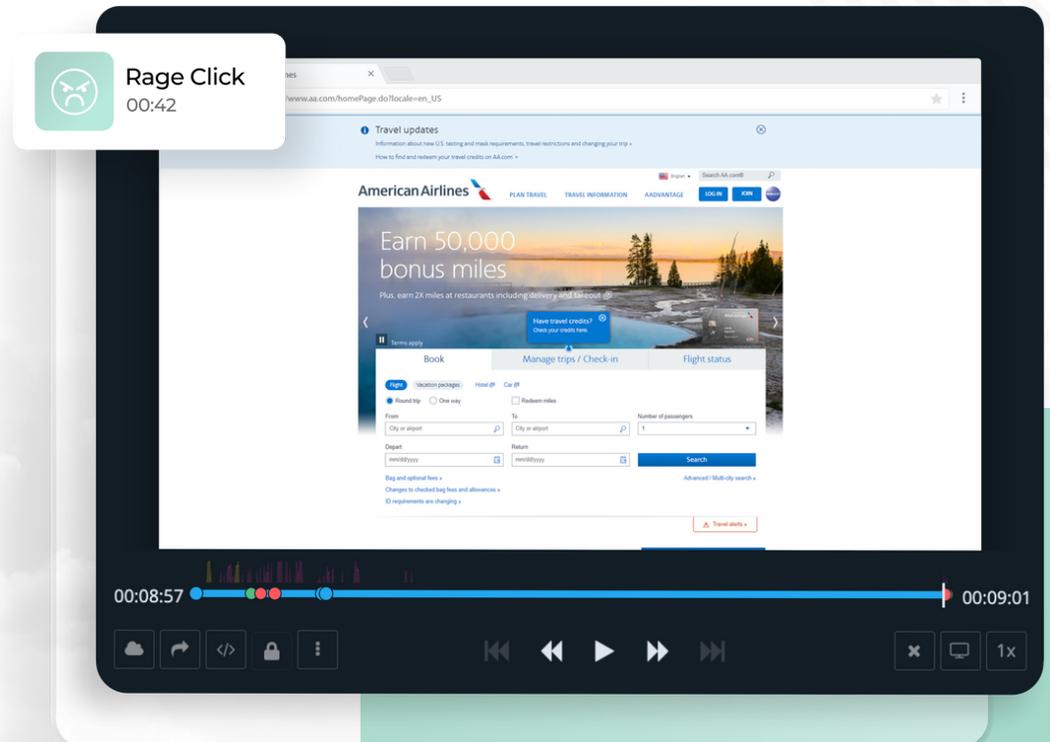
This top five global airlines had started their digital transformation before the pandemic. But after a 65% decline in domestic air travel, they knew they had to move quickly. They viewed the crisis as an opportunity to accelerate transformation, iterate faster and be more customer-centric.

Up until a few years ago, the airlines invested in traditional project-based development, which involved delivering large-scale projects with long release cycles.

“We'd been trying to move from a project based work to a product based world pre-pandemic. And the pandemic actually helped us expedite that process. As they say, never let a crisis go to waste.”

Today, they are much more product-focused, allowing them to iterate and test with smaller audiences. This approach of Continuous Product Design allowed them to iterate at speed and scale, so they can build products that align around customer needs.

He said they've put more focus on prototype testing to gather consumer feedback before rolling a product out in production. “This helps inform our decision better on whether we need to invest the time and resources, then we can keep improving on it.”



Quantum Metric enables real-time agent support by identifying customer struggle and errors as they happen, so agents can easily find sessions and get to solutions fast.

The biggest opportunity: real-time customer empathy



As people re-evaluate how safe it is to travel again, it's more important than ever to reassure customers that it will be a great experience. And even more important to know immediately when they're not having a great experience.

When a customer struggles while checking in at your airline's kiosk, usually there's an agent available to immediately see them struggling and help.

But what happens when thousands or millions of customers are simultaneously frustrated and trying to make a reservation on your mobile app or website? New or less loyal customers are unlikely to contact the help center and more likely to abandon for an OTA or competitor and never return. So how well can you see their frustration and get actionable insights in real-time?

United Airlines quantifies frustration

In the LEAP 2021 session "Pairing direct and indirect feedback," Michael Petermann, Managing Director, Digital Products and Strategy, United Airlines said their team uses Quantum Metric to address digital friction issues that were affecting hundreds of thousands of users.

Using Quantum Metric's intelligent frustration detection, United was able to quickly identify a struggling customer, leading to them abandoning their mobile website.

Leveraging quantification, they quickly discovered thousands of other customers experiencing the exact same issue.

"Immediately, it was like, 'Houston we have a problem.' There were 120,000 other people who had this same issue. That was a surprise."

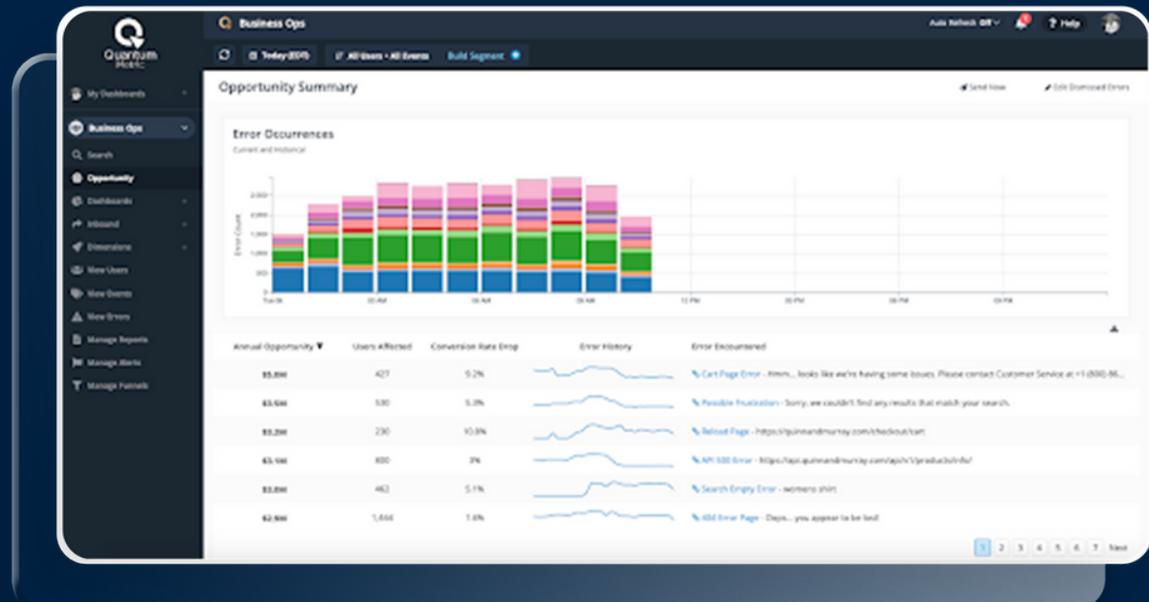
Why hadn't more people complained about it to United's voice of customer channels? Turns out, the issue was happening on a mobile web device and the customer feedback tab wasn't showing up in the first place.

"So this particular customer had such a bad experience, they actually left the mobile web device, went to a desktop computer, found the site feedback tab and told us about it," Petermann said. "If you find that particular piece of feedback, you could use a platform like Quantum Metric, build an event to then quantify it and see if it's happening to the masses. That's one example of something we've tried and had success with."



MICHAEL PETERMANN

Managing Director
United Airlines



Watch Michael speak about "Pairing Vocal and Silent Customer Feedback."

WATCH NOW



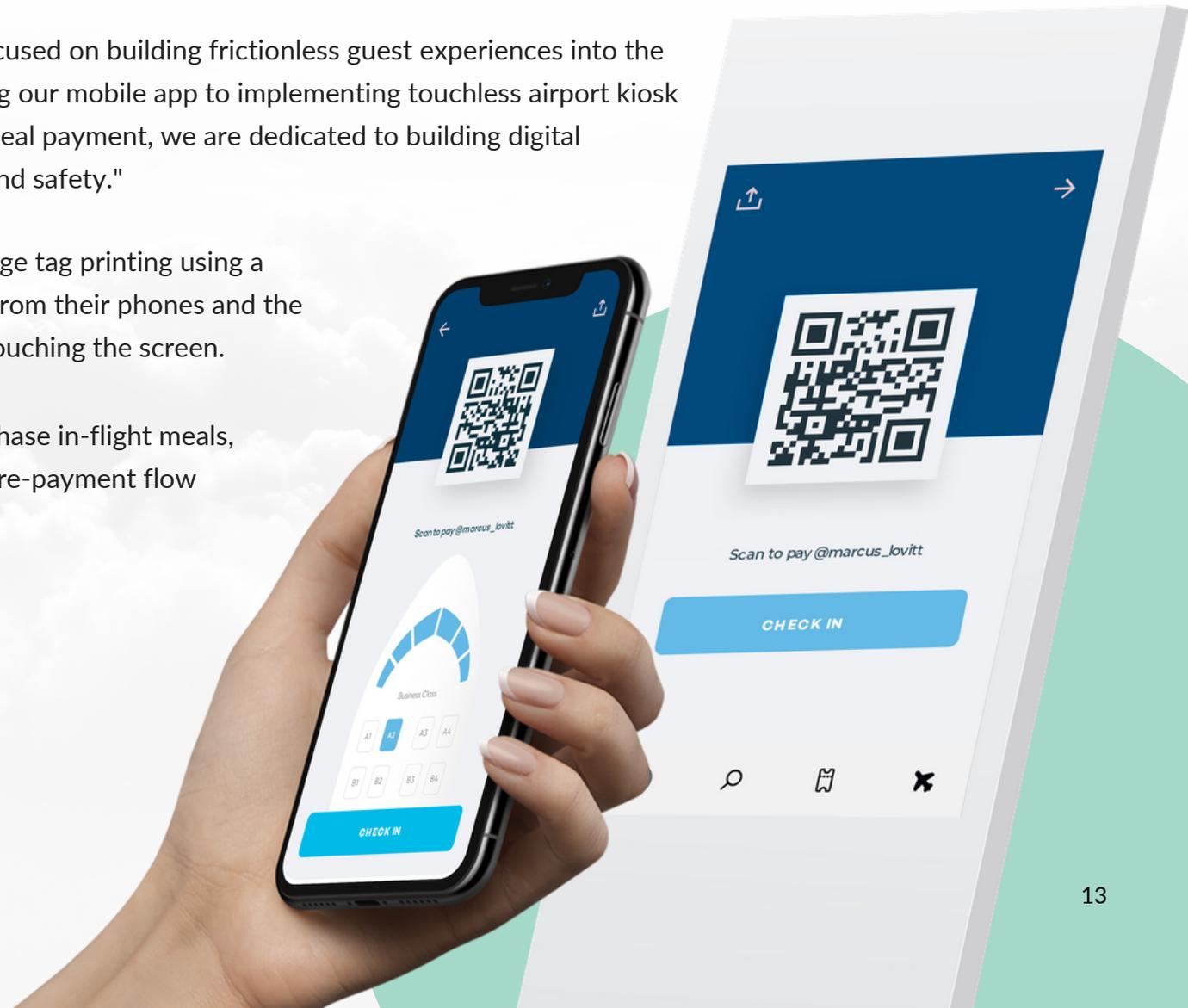
Alaska Airlines goes contactless

Alaska Airlines is rethinking the entire guest journey around touchless. Jessi Lewis says they're highly focused on making guest interactions as frictionless as possible.

"As we look ahead, the digital team is focused on building frictionless guest experiences into the physical journey," said Lewis. "From using our mobile app to implementing touchless airport kiosk interactions to building online in-flight meal payment, we are dedicated to building digital experiences that enable guest comfort and safety."

For example, they are reevaluating luggage tag printing using a QR code. Guests would be able to scan from their phones and the bag tag would be printed without ever touching the screen.

To reduce credit card exchanges to purchase in-flight meals, the airline is also considering an online pre-payment flow during check-in.



Your digital readiness checklist

As travelers rush back to direct channels to book their next vacation, now is the time to invest in elevating the experience, from booking to check-in. Eliminating friction is especially critical to re-engage customers and re-build loyalty to direct channels when every microconversion counts. This means more contactless, self-service functionality that is fast and simple.

Here are recommendations to help you elevate the customer experience:

- **Get proactive/automated detection of user behavior** - prepare for the surge in traffic and online bookings with automated frustration events such as rage taps on apps or non-respondent errors on airport kiosks. Avoid false positives!
- **Link real-time notifications to session replay** - go directly to the issues that matter to your business and your customers without manually "sorting" through hundreds of sessions to find the "needle in the haystack."
- **Quantify bookings and revenue impact to customer experience** - instantly understand the impact of the customer experience on bookings, revenue or check-in flow, so you can prioritize the opportunities that have the most impact on your bottom line.
- **Monitor core health vitals** - track page speed, errors, and API response times to ensure revenue isn't lost due to customers abandoning digital channels and flooding the call centers.
- **Protect customer privacy and security** - to ensure safe, personalized experiences, ensure sensitive or personally identifiable information is never captured or, if absolutely critical to capture, data is securely encrypted.
- **Enhance agile with better collaboration across business and IT** - remove barriers and data silos between teams so they can collaborate and prioritize with speed and confidence. This cross-team approach builds on your existing agile process and is called Continuous Product Design. [Get certified](#) in CPD.

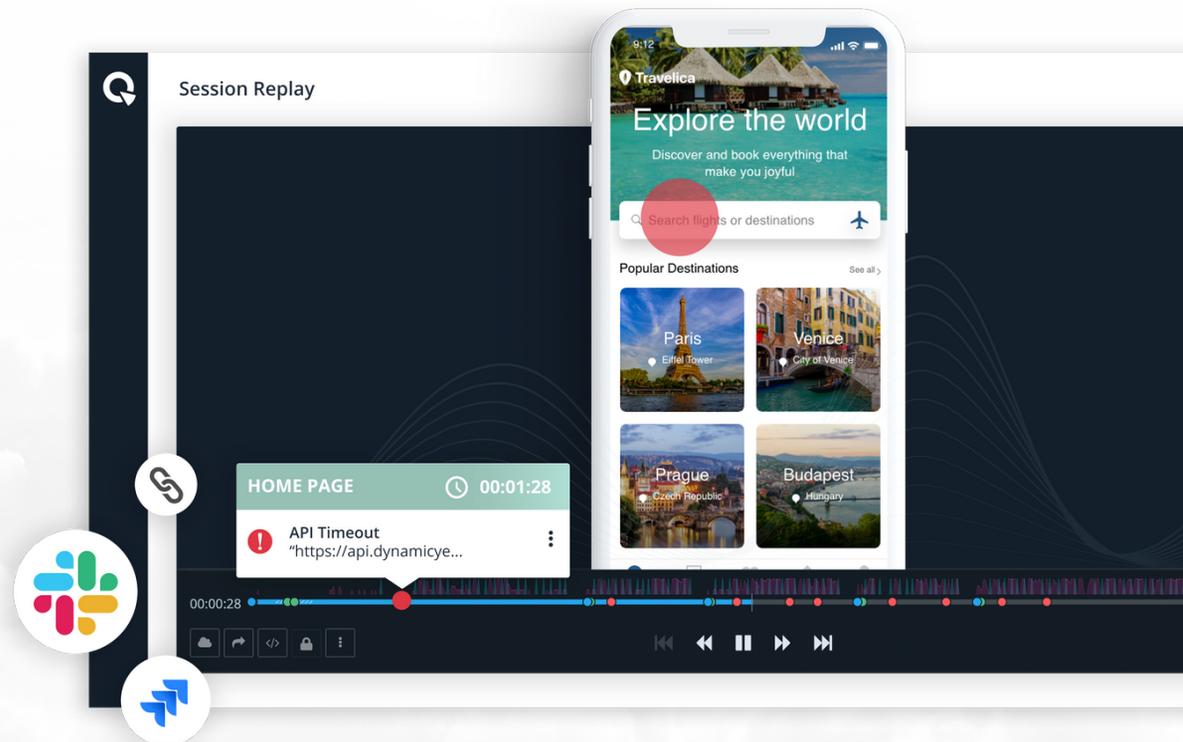
Quantum Metric helps airlines proactively identify and reduce customer friction faster

Quantum Metric understands the complexity of airline digital platforms. We know this because we work with 3 out of the 5 largest carriers in the business.

We help airlines understand how your customers interact with your website and mobile apps in real-time, so you can proactively improve the customer experience while prioritizing the best ways to increase revenue from bookings, upsells, and ancillary products.

Democratizing insights

Our platform helps airlines automatically capture every digital interaction—like clicks, taps, scrolls, long running spinners, 404 errors—and correlate that to business impact. We serve as the “glue” between your analytics, voice of customer, log monitoring, and performance monitoring tools—and reduce the time it takes for teams to derive insight and drive action.



LEARN MORE





About QuantumMetric

Quantum Metric helps companies build better digital products faster, by keeping business and technical teams aligned, efficient, and focused on what matters most to customers. Our platform gives businesses real-time visibility into how their digital business is impacted, where exactly customers are struggling or engaging, and what efforts need to be prioritized based on economic impact.

www.quantummetric.com