



SUPERCHARGING TRAVEL:
10 TRENDS THAT WILL
SHAPE THE INDUSTRY
OVER THE NEXT DECADE



About the Report

Supercharging Travel: 10 Trends That Will Shape the Industry Over the Next Decade

A PhocusWire Report sponsored by RateHawk
Author: Matthew Parsons

Published in 2026 by PhocusWire. We are a brand of Phocuswright, a wholly owned subsidiary of Northstar Travel Media, LLC.

© 2026 PhocusWire
All Rights Reserved.
[PhocusWire.com](https://www.phocuswire.com)



Contents

Introduction: A decade of disruption	4
10 things that will supercharge travel professionals in the next 10 years	6
1. Diversification of travel	6
2. Social media influence	8
3. Price sensitivity	9
4. Reacting to instability	10
5. Moving fast	12
6. The agentic era	14
7. Data quality focus	17
8. Technology infrastructure	18
9. Payments as a superpower	19
10. The human touch	20
Conclusion	21

Introduction:

A decade of disruption

In 2016, the travel industry was entering a period of steady digital maturation. Fast forward to today, and the past 10 years have rewired how vacations are promoted, purchased and delivered.

Some predictions from that era read differently now. “Many people used to say travel agents won’t exist in 10 years,” recalls Felix Shpilman, CEO of Emerging Travel Group, which operates RateHawk, an online B2B platform for travel professionals.

“But they do exist. And they’re stronger than ever, actually. The number of travel agents has doubled globally.”

The global shutdown accelerated digital adoption, too. “Even during the pandemic, you thought it was going to be survival of the fittest, and [yet] it just generated even more new opportunities,” says Astrid Kastberg, managing director of RateHawk.

RateHawk was founded on a simple premise: travel professionals deserve a platform built for the way they actually work. While that mission has not changed over the last decade, the technology powering it in the next 10 years will look very different.

A decade ago, most travel professional conversations focused on the products: destinations, hotels and cruises. Today, those conversations are about the tech—real-time data, connectivity and platform efficiency—as the topics that define the competitive landscape and will continue to do so in the decade ahead of us.

“Any travel company relies on technology to operate. It’s a necessity rather than a commodity. It’s the technology and the data that allows the company to define its USPs and become more efficient,” Kastberg says.

As part of RateHawk’s 10th anniversary, this report maps out where the next decade of disruption will likely lead. It draws on Phocuswright research, RateHawk’s own surveys and conversations with the company’s team members, customers and technology and distribution partners.

The view of what comes next has never been more exciting.

“Many people used to say travel agents won’t exist in 10 years. But they do exist. And they’re stronger than ever, actually.”

Felix Shpilman
CEO of Emerging Travel Group

10 significant travel industry events from the last 10 years

2016: The birth of TikTok

ByteDance launched TikTok in China in September 2016. It was initially called “Douyin” for its home market, then rebranded to TikTok as it later took off around the rest of the world. Today, short-form video is a powerful force in travel inspiration, with destinations, hotels and tour operators competing for viral moments that drive direct booking intent.

2017: NDC Leaderboard

This was the year the International Air Transport Association (IATA) set up its NDC (New Distribution Capability) Leaderboard, aimed at accelerating adoption among airlines. As this adoption ramps up, more travel professionals are upgrading their tech stacks to access inventory.

2018: GDPR comes into force

The EU’s General Data Protection Regulation came into effect May 24, reshaping how travel companies collect, store and use customer data. It reshaped email marketing, personalisation strategies and loyalty programs across the entire industry.

2019: Thomas Cook collapses

On September 23, 178 years of history came to a close as the group ceased trading, with 150,000 British holidaymakers repatriated. The failure exposed the fragility of protection for those booking outside the package model and led to greater appetite for bookings with financial protection.

2020: Global pandemic

On March 11, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak a global pandemic. In the long term, lockdown has significantly transformed the industry, accelerating the digital transformation of travel businesses. Flexible booking policies, digital check-in and contactless payments have since become baseline consumer expectations.

2021: Lifting of lockdown restrictions

As the number of infections decreased, the world gradually returned back to normal. The release of pent-up demand established “revenge travel” as a trend and accelerated “digital nomadism”. Yet the surge overwhelmed an industry that had drastically downsized, creating a demand-supply mismatch that drove prices sharply. Inflationary pressures continue to this day.

2022: OpenAI launches ChatGPT

The launch of a new chatbot led to the massive adoption of various AI tools and started a complete transformation of travel search and planning. Now, AI-assisted itinerary building and conversational search are reshaping how customers discover and plan holidays, compressing the consideration phase.

2024: Agentic AI boom

Anthropic released the Model Context Protocol, setting up how large language models can connect to external tools. This quickly led to the launch of numerous AI agents and raised disputes about the human role in new workflows. Travel professionals are now working on feeding them live inventory and fares, and positioning themselves as trusted data sources and service layers for new booking workflows.

2025: Record tourism growth

Travel and tourism’s global GDP contribution reached a record \$11.6 trillion in 2025, accounting for 9.8% of the global economy, declared the World Travel & Tourism Council. The boom attracted fresh investment into the industry but also intensified overtourism pressures that are prompting destinations to introduce taxes and other access controls.

2026: Middle East conflict

The U.S.–Iran conflict disrupted global connectivity, as tensions around the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf airspace forced flight rerouting and increased travel costs. Operators now are repricing or repositioning affected itineraries, while travel professionals respond to new customer queries and rebookings.

10 things that will supercharge travel professionals in the next 10 years

These are the forces that stand to reshape the travel industry even further over the coming decade. By addressing them head on, travel professionals can set themselves up for success in the next decade.

1. Diversification of travel

Travel professionals can expect more unique vacation requests over the next decade. Of course, there will always be a place for weekend city breaks, trips to Disney World and lazy beach vacations, but prepare for an evolution in tastes as travelers increasingly seek out experiences that are authentic, aesthetic and emotional.

Diversification is being driven by a variety of trends that developed since the pandemic ended. The reopening of borders reignited a passion for travel, and prompted people to reevaluate what “normal” looks like.

For example, tourists now seek out more meaningful travel, including multi-generational trips that drive demand for bigger accommodation.

There’s an increased desire to reconnect with nature, pushing wellness travel up the agenda and more demand for retreat-style properties.

The post-pandemic boom also heightened overtourism. So bear in mind that as more of us travel, many tourists now hunt out less-crowded spots, as well as experiences more personal to them.

The influence of streaming is growing as well, as fans of series like *The White Lotus*, *Emily in Paris*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Crown* and others search for photogenic stays.

And let’s not forget remote work, where clients book longer stays in larger accommodation that offers separate spaces (and a level of privacy) to open their laptops.

How to prepare?

Be diverse. To master the new distribution landscape, travel professionals need access to a large range of accommodation options. The RateHawk platform offers more than 3.2 million hotels worldwide from 350 suppliers, from world-known hotel chains to niche villas and boutique hotels.

RateHawk’s research shows manually searching for the best deals is the travel professional’s “biggest time waster.” That’s why RateHawk empowered its search engine with over 50 filter parameters and an AI-driven “Smart Sort” tool that determines the most suitable accommodation options based on user behavior and preferences. No matter how unusual the request appears, the perfect fit can be found within seconds.



"We request unique inventory, and this is something RateHawk does well because, based on my traditional source market and destination countries, RateHawk is quite different and strong in some countries where I am not."

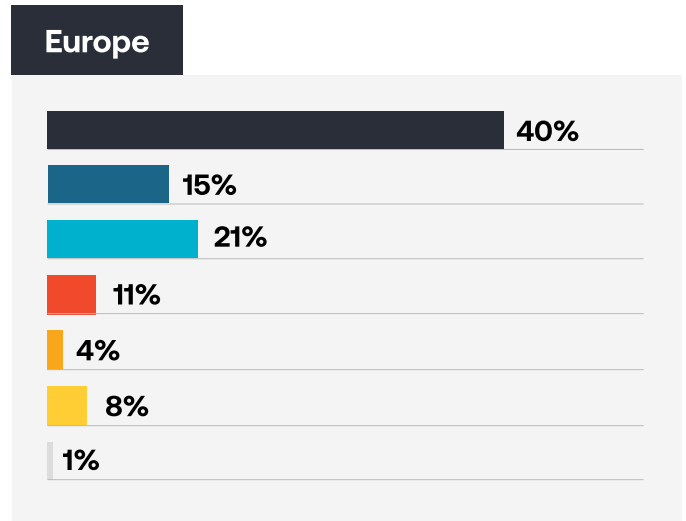
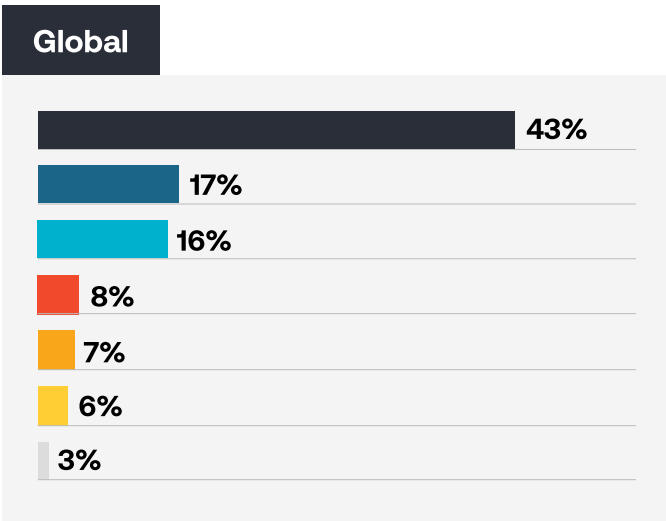
Francesc Lopez
CFO and CSO, Stayforlong.com

Figure 1: What is your biggest time-Waster?

When asked about tasks taking up valuable work time, nearly half of the respondents identify manual searches for the best deals as their primary concern. Professionals also report

feeling overwhelmed by the large number of platforms they have to manually search to find competitive prices and avoid losing sales.

- Searching manually for the best deals
- Handling booking changes
- Repetitive administrative tasks
- Ongoing client communications
- Clarifying booking details
- Gathering trip materials



2. Social media influence

Social media overhauled traveler inspiration and discovery over the past decade, and that's set to continue. According to Phocuswright's [U.S. Traveler Trends 2025](#) report, 64% of U.S.-based Gen Z travelers made a travel decision based on content they saw on social media. And looking at the subset of what [Phocuswright defines as "indulgent explorers,"](#) social media is actually the biggest influence for Gen Z and millennial travelers.

The incoming wave of Gen Alpha customers, those born from 2010-2024, is a digitally native cohort that will continue to be inspired by social media and are more willing to share experiences online. So it is important to interact with them in the way they're accustomed to on the platforms they're using.

"This is a generation that is used to consuming information in a very different way: quick impressions, memes, reels. So how do travel professionals imitate the behaviors of social media and remain relevant, because their attention span is a lot shorter?" Kastberg says.

Short-form video, influencer marketing and social commerce also will likely gain importance as marketing touchpoints, predicts Phocuswright's [Travel Innovation and Technology Trends 2026](#) report.

"Today, I see even some of our million-dollar-plus sellers using social media. They're definitely getting leads. They're sharing the trips they're taking or trips they're hosting with clients."

Shemain Grasso

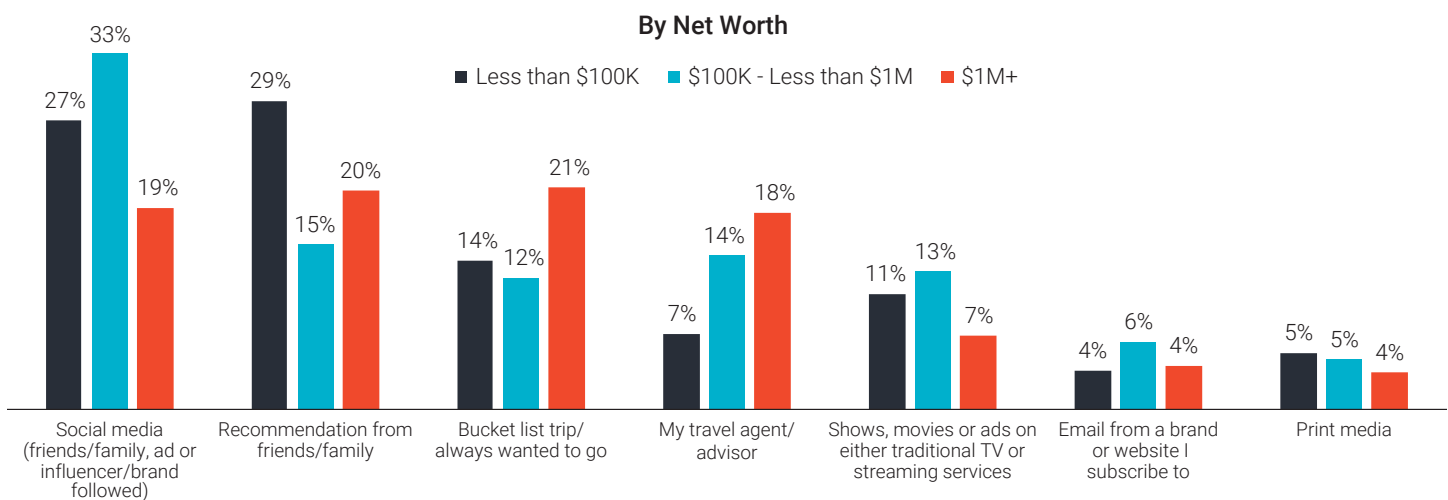
vice president of land and strategic partnerships,
Oasis Travel Network

How to prepare:

Decode next-gen behaviors. Travel professionals should build a strong social media brand and communicate with their audience online. Consider social media as a platform not to just promote your services but as a powerful tool for community building and to reach more consumers.

Think about the most relevant channels for your overall strategy and continually evaluate them to ensure your brand stays fresh. Remember that Gen Z and Gen Alpha are more visually-oriented, so strong use of images and video content can be particularly effective.

Figure 2: Initial Trip Inspiration



Source: Phocuswright's U.S. Consumer Travel Report 1H26

3. Price sensitivity

Travel is becoming more expensive. Inflation surged after the pandemic and has remained elevated compared to the decades before. The Middle East conflict is also impacting the cost of fuel for airlines, while in the hospitality sector, energy bills are mounting, combined with the ongoing labor shortages, wage pressures and increasing taxes.

Though luxury holds up because wealthy travelers are insulated, the rise in the cost of living affects all segments, particularly mid- and low-income individuals. And while travel has always been an expensive purchase, consumers are spending more cautiously: [according to Phocuswright](#), while the number of trips remains unchanged, average annual spend has declined. The younger travelers are more cost-conscious, seeking value and comparison options.

How to prepare:

Travel professionals need to ensure access to strong and reliable supply, whether through a platform or via direct API integration.

For a travel agent, it is important to demonstrate expertise by helping clients balance the cost of a trip with the quality of the experience. This includes advising on where it is worth splurging and where it makes sense to save across different aspects of the vacation.



“Because of the buying power of RateHawk, the hard-to-find inventory is important to our advisors and their clients. Competitive pricing is important even for the very elite or discerning travelers. They are still looking for the best price.”

Shemain Grasso

vice president of land and strategic partnerships,
Oasis Travel Network

Figure 3: Accommodation cost was also influential in destination selection for those younger than baby boomers.

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers+
Price of airline ticket (28%)	Price of airline ticket (34%)	Price of airline ticket (25%)	Visiting friends or family there (40%)
Price of accommodations (24%)	Price of accommodations (26%)	Price of accommodations (24%)	Prior experience (24%)
Views/scenery (22%)	Family friendly/ Recommendation by friends/family (21%)	Visiting friends or family there (23%)	Views/scenery (16%)
Recommendation by friends/family (21%)	Natural attractions (20%)	Family friendly/Prior experience (21%)	Price of accommodations/ Climate (15%)
Own a vacation home there/Visiting friends or family there (19%)	Affordability of dining/shopping (19%)	Natural attractions (19%)	Cultural attractions (13%)

Source: Phocuswright's U.S. Consumer Travel Report 2025

4. Reacting to instability

Geopolitical instability is a concern. In RateHawk's survey of 1,300 travel professionals, changing travel regulations and policies topped a list of industry-related challenges affecting work, with more than a quarter (27%) finding these complexities the hardest aspect to navigate. Financial instability and the risks related to supplier bankruptcies were cited by 23% of respondents.

The travel professional's role becomes even more important due to the increasing instability around the world. Advisors help travelers navigate an increasingly complex landscape and adjust their plans in case of any disruptions. With their experience and quick access to supply, they can also quickly recommend alternatives to save the long-awaited vacations.

How to prepare:

Adapt to every horizon. Build a resilient supply mix—ensure access to a wide range of inventory (hotels, flights, transfers), so rebooking can be done fast if disruptions occur. Whenever possible, prioritize refundable or flexible booking options to allow for quick adjustments to travel plans.

Diversify risk exposure by avoiding over-reliance on a single destination or product category, this helps buffer against localized unrests.

"When travel suppliers collapse, we've seen the damage and chaos that it causes...If I have a stable supplier to support me if anything happens, that's a huge trust factor. It's about the relationship we create with travel agencies, and how much they trust our company. The financial stability of your supplier — that's something undervalued at times".

Astrid Kastberg

managing director, RateHawk



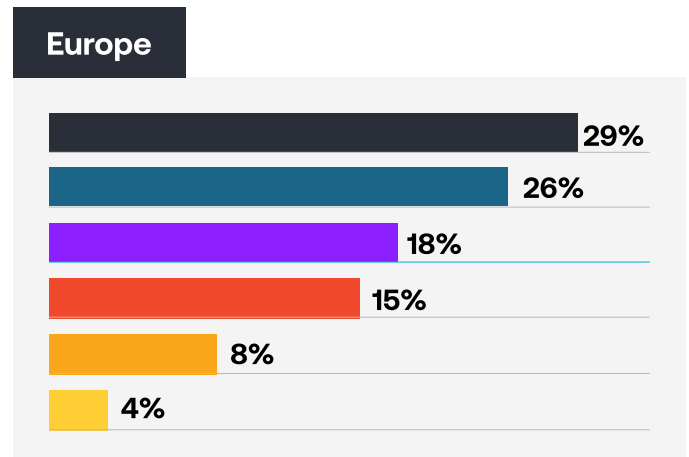
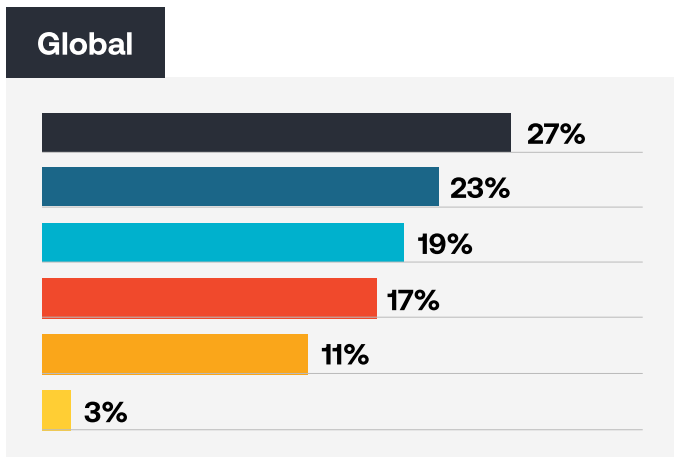


Figure 4: What is the most complicated industry change for you?

Top of the industry-related challenges affecting travel professionals' work were changing travel regulations and policies, with more than a quarter (27%) finding these complexities the hardest aspect to navigate. Another major

concern, cited by nearly a quarter of respondents (23%), was financial instability and the risks related to supplier bankruptcies. Adopting new technologies and software platforms ranked third (19%).

- Changes in travel regulations and policies
- Financial instability or supplier bankruptcy risks
- Adopting new technologies and software
- Shifting customer preferences
- Emerging travel trends and destinations
- Other



5. Moving fast

Travelers are increasingly prioritizing spontaneous decision-making, and RateHawk's survey found that 24% of travel professionals cited "meeting client expectations" as a challenge. They also need to keep pace with their customers, because if they can get an instant answer from a chatbot, waiting 24 hours for a reply to an email can feel like eternity.

Younger generations in particular exhibit shorter patience and attention spans and want prompt replies. This is largely shaped by their digital environment, where communication is immediate, information is constantly available and interactions happen in real time. As a result, they are less likely to wait for delayed replies or follow traditional communication cycles.

How to prepare:

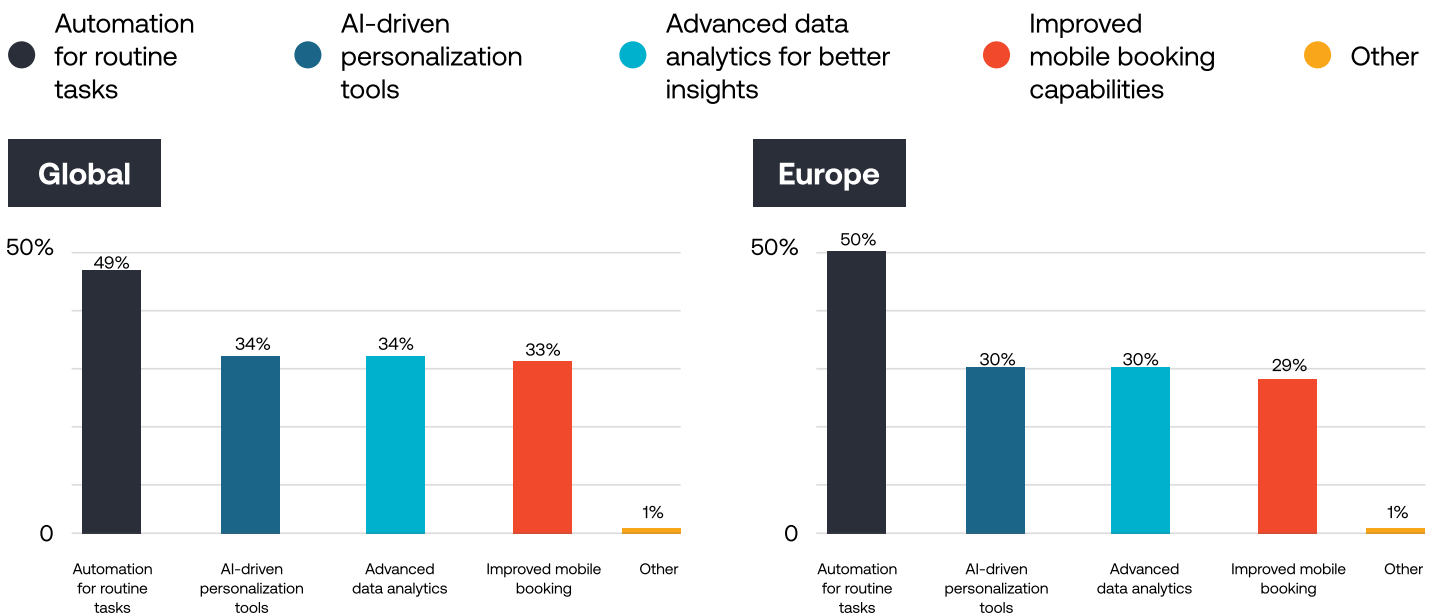
Speed wins. Consolidate technology where possible. The demand for all-in-one solutions and end-to-end booking in a single place means fragmented workflows are a liability. Reassess how many systems you are switching between to build a single itinerary and push toward platforms that unify search, booking, payment and servicing.

Tools such as Trips/Quotes at RateHawk enable travel professionals to quickly compile travel options into a single template and share it via a link, allowing customers to confirm their final choice directly within the quote. This helps reduce back-and-forth communication and makes the booking process faster.

Figure 5: What type of technology would you like to see more of?

Among the most desired technologies to implement, half of the respondents preferred various automation tools like CRM and mid-/back-offices. And about one-third highlighted interest in AI-driven personalisation tools (34%), advanced data analytics (34%),

or enhanced mobile booking capabilities (33%). Open-ended responses indicate specific interest in the help of artificial intelligence (AI) in building itineraries based on each client's preferences and the enhanced, reliable booking engines for travel professionals with real-time updates.



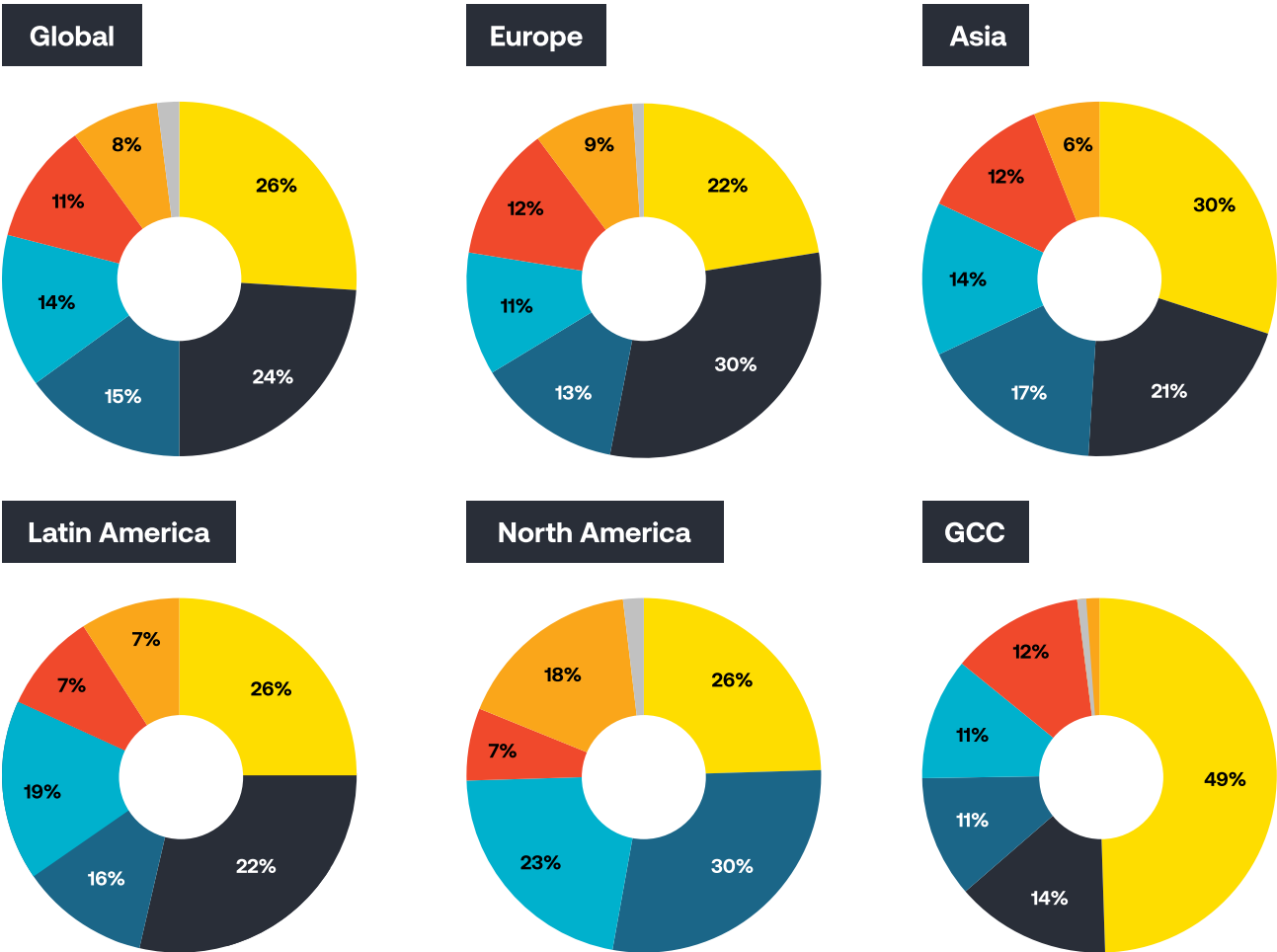
"Clients want to maximize their time, and the advisors are who they are going to trust to have the knowledge to guide them and make sure everything comes together the right way."

Shemain Grasso

vice president of land and strategic partnerships, Oasis Travel Network.

Figure 6: What challenges do you face?

- Managing high competition
- Meeting client expectations
- Maintaining desired income levels
- Finding the right booking platform
- Keeping up with industry changes
- Handling administrative work changes
- Other



6. The agentic era

It is hard to ignore the role of AI in shaping travel. While machine learning, large language models and generative AI have been around for some time and have already become familiar tools, one trend that looks set to supercharge travel businesses in the coming decade is agentic AI.

AI agents can act like a personal assistant or junior specialist, capable of researching, analyzing, making decisions and even completing transactions. The process can be designed to operate with a “human in the loop” or complete autonomy.

The various standards to make this work are still being developed, with data fragmentation and trust among the main barriers to widespread adoption, yet RateHawk’s survey reveals a willingness to start delegating to AI agents.

Of the travel professionals polled, 57% show a positive attitude toward the potential use of AI at work, while trust depends on the job type. Among the top job types that travel professionals trust to AI are:

- 49.7% of respondents trust AI in following up with clients about pending payments.
- 49.5% trust AI to check visa or document requirements when planning a trip for a client.
- 49.2% trust AI in assessing external risks (such as geopolitical or weather-related factors) before making a booking.

How to prepare:

Understand what’s coming. Travel agents don’t need to compete with agentic AI, they need to integrate it into their workflows and reposition their value. Those who adapt well will become faster, more strategic and more indispensable to clients. Start using AI with lower-stakes, time-consuming tasks and build your confidence from there.

Also watch the emerging standards. The underlying technologies and protocols that let agents transact across suppliers are still being built.

“Travel professionals should be actively experimenting with and implementing AI solutions to improve their day-to-day work,” Shpilman says.

“It is a responsibility of the travel professionals who are trying to do better for both their clients and their bottom lines. Ignoring it and waiting it out is the wrong strategy, you will simply be outpaced by a competitor who doesn’t.”

That demand will reach travel professionals before they feel ready, so at least test basic agentic workflows to avoid being caught out.

“There will be cases where you’ve tried something, you’ve invested some time and then you throw it away six months later; that’s how quickly the technology is developing,” Shpilman says. “But it doesn’t mean that you should just sit and wait for the technology to mature.”



RateHawk's travel tech field guide:

10 AI acronyms every travel professional needs to know

A2A: Agent-to-Agent

The idea of AI agents communicating directly with other AI agents to complete a booking or service task, without a human in the loop.

ACP: Agentic Commerce Protocol

Chat-GPT maker OpenAI and payment tech company Stripe's standard for letting AI agents complete purchases on a user's behalf, including payment authorisation.

AP2: Agent Payments Protocol.

Google's version of ACP. It teamed up with 60 organizations to help shape the future of agentic payments, including household names American Express, Mastercard, Paypal, Salesforce and more.

AGI: Artificial General Intelligence

Where AI matches or exceeds humans across most cognitive tasks.

ASI: Artificial Super Intelligence

The evolution of AGI, where AI outperforms the best human abilities across every domain by a wide margin.

GEO: Generative Engine Optimization

A new type of marketing that focuses on getting brands to appear inside ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews and others.

LLM: Large Language Model

The underlying technology behind the current wave of AI in travel: ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and their open-source counterparts.

MCP: Model Context Protocol

A way LLMs connect to external tools and data sources through a common interface. In travel, it's the plumbing that lets an AI agent query a GDS, PMS or booking engine without a bespoke integration for each.

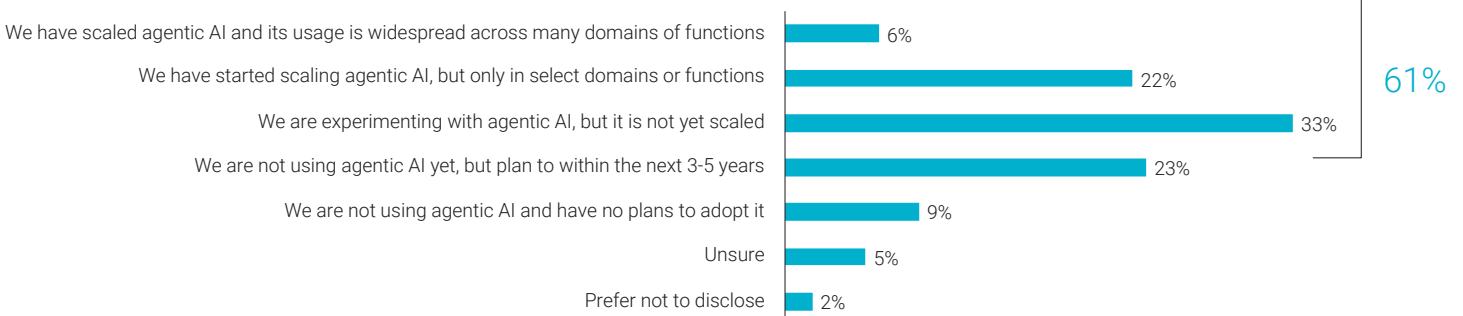
NLP: Natural Language Processing

This is how computers parse and create human language, so that means they produce actual words rather than binary 1s and 0s.

RAG: Retrieval-Augmented Generation

Process where an LLM retrieves documents (hotel policies, fare rules, destination content) to find an answer.

Figure 7: Current and planned use of agentic AI



Source: Budgets, Barriers and the Race to Agentic AI



Figure 8: What is the most desired change?

Technology is seen as a critical enabler and a crucial part of travel professionals' future. Approximately one-third of respondents stated that if they could change just one thing about their jobs, it would be to implement technology that optimizes their workload, making this the second most popular choice, behind

only higher commissions. Another frequently selected answer was reduced paperwork and administrative tasks (20%).

This further highlights professionals' desire for better technological solutions to streamline their daily responsibilities.

- Higher commission levels
- Greater use of technology to optimize work
- Less paperwork and administrative tasks
- Increased client trust in my recommendations
- Other



7. Data quality focus

The travel professionals who know their clients best will always win the booking, but they will need to ensure data quality is high in order to build client profiles for the systems and agents of the future.

A typical travel business holds client information across email threads, booking confirmations, loyalty accounts and spreadsheets—rarely in a form that machines can read, query or learn from.

Travel professionals must think about future-proofing their business today, because in the coming decade more AI-driven processes will be interacting with their data, which needs to be structured.

“We are seeing a lot of our partners coming to us and asking how to handle and arrange data properly,” notes Shpilman. “Their data quality is frequently not in a good state. Spreadsheets are not databases.”

Sanjay Ghare, founder and CEO at Vervotech, a RateHawk API partner that specializes in the APAC region, also believes that data fragmentation is the single biggest thing holding travel technology back.

“Not a lack of innovation. Not a lack of capital. The data underneath all of it is broken. And when data is broken, everything built on top of it is unreliable,” he says. “Your AI makes bad recommendations. Your pricing engine works with duplicated inventory. Your personalization sounds smart but sends the wrong offer to the wrong guest.”

How to prepare:

Invest in data quality. Improving data quality starts with acknowledging the gap between what you currently have and what AI systems need to function effectively. The first step is consolidation, moving client records into a dedicated customer relationship management (CRM) system. Use standardized fields and consistent formats for dates, names, passport details, dietary requirements and travel preferences. Autonomous agents can only transact against systems they can read, so inventory, rates, cancellation policies and supplier contracts need to be structured in order to be read.



“Every PMS, every booking engine, every channel manager operates in its own world. And we keep stitching them together with expensive middleware and manual workarounds. That is not a technology strategy. I call this the refinement era. We got excited about building. Now we need to get serious about the foundation. Until data quality is treated as infrastructure and not as someone else’s problem, every new technology we layer on top is a house built on sand.”

Sanjay Ghare
founder and CEO, Vervotech

8. Technology infrastructure

Distribution will likely fragment further—across NDC, direct hotel APIs, and new aggregators— so having a flexible, scalable technology foundation is essential.

In the coming decade, travel professionals should not think about technology infrastructure as a back-office or administration concern, but rather as the most direct route to growth, where speed, choice and reliability are made possible by strong API connections.

“Agents and OTAs need to make it simple,” argues Francesc Lopez, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Strategy Officer at Stayforlong.com. “For example, you can be working with a Hilton hotel in London but working with this hotel through five different suppliers! They can give you different pricing, different policies, rates, availability ... that is the biggest challenge for the industry: to simplify the complexity.”

And related to previous themes in this white paper, it is ultimately the right infrastructure that will future-proof a business when agentic AI moves from concept to reality. RateHawk’s own footprint of 1,400 API partners and a 40% year-on-year rise in bookings per partner in 2025 shows how quickly volume follows when the infrastructure and connections are in place.

How to prepare:

Build the right technology stack. Choosing the right partners means prioritizing breadth of inventory, reliability of connection and the ability to integrate seamlessly with other tools in the ecosystem.

Invest in API connections: instead of relying on disconnected tools that each hold partial or outdated information, APIs allow systems to interact continuously and automatically, creating a single connected data environment.

“Agents want three things: speed, choice, and reliability. With RateHawk’s global supply and ZentrumHub’s universal API, agents don’t have to worry about multiple integrations or gaps in inventory. Everything becomes simpler: Better access to inventory, faster bookings, more competitive pricing and less operational headache.”

Boney Mittal

chief commercial officer, ZentrumHub

“There are many partners you can work with, but few that let you scale up all operations in a massive way, and this is why you only need to work with high-tech companies. RateHawk helps me produce the volume that I am doing now.”

Francesc Lopez

CFO and CSO, Stayforlong.com

“Smaller travel agents need to have a booking engine in place, so you can move among different suppliers. You need a system so you can pull from everybody. Otherwise, if your client walks in and says, ‘no, your rate is not good,’ then you are in trouble.”

Jack Lim

chief strategy officer, Within Earth Holidays

9. Payments as a superpower

When you think about experiences, you might picture a luxury spa treatment or a desert camp under the stars. But payments, the way customers actually buy their vacation, are an experience too.

Whether it's a one-click checkout, the option to split the cost with friends and family or the ability to spread payments over time, removing friction has been proven to "delight" consumers. And over the next decade, customers will grow even less tolerant of it.

Payment infrastructure is top of mind for Lopez since Stayforlong.com is an agency that, as the name suggests, specializes in longer vacations. Because these trips can be expensive, Lopez appreciates that guests can be more sensitive about how they pay. "If you offer a long stay, and the price is €5,000, families normally need to split that. So we focus on pay now, pay later rates," he says.

Fraud prevention tools are equally important for travel professionals. Together with flexible payment terms, they turn payments from a back-office function into a competitive advantage.

How to prepare:

Choose partners providing multiple payment options.

RateHawk's platform gives partners flexible payment terms and commissions, alongside bookings without a deposit. Travel professionals can settle in several ways—bank transfer, debit or credit card or a pay-by-link sent directly to clients—and the RateHawk API supports credit card payments natively.



10. The human touch

Supercharge your business by remembering how important human relationships are. They will stand out in the tech-driven era, becoming a key factor in how partners and clients choose who to work with.

According to Phocuswright's report, What's Old Is New Again: Travel Agents in the Digital Age, talking to a human tops the list of reasons for using a travel agent. People may research obsessively online, but they still turn to agents for reassurance and expertise.

And as more brands adopt new technologies and increase access to the same suppliers this coming decade, the challenge will be how to differentiate. This is where a travel professional's personality can shine through.

How to prepare:

Map out the full client journey and identify the points where a human voice genuinely changes the outcome.

That could be a discovery call that uncovers what a trip really needs to deliver, or the reassurance before a complex multi-stop itinerary. Or supporting customers during critical situations, making last adjustments when a flight is delayed,

"The travel advisor's role is becoming more important, not less important, because as technology handles more of the transactional side, the advisors focus on their relationships and guidance and stepping in when something needs to be solved."

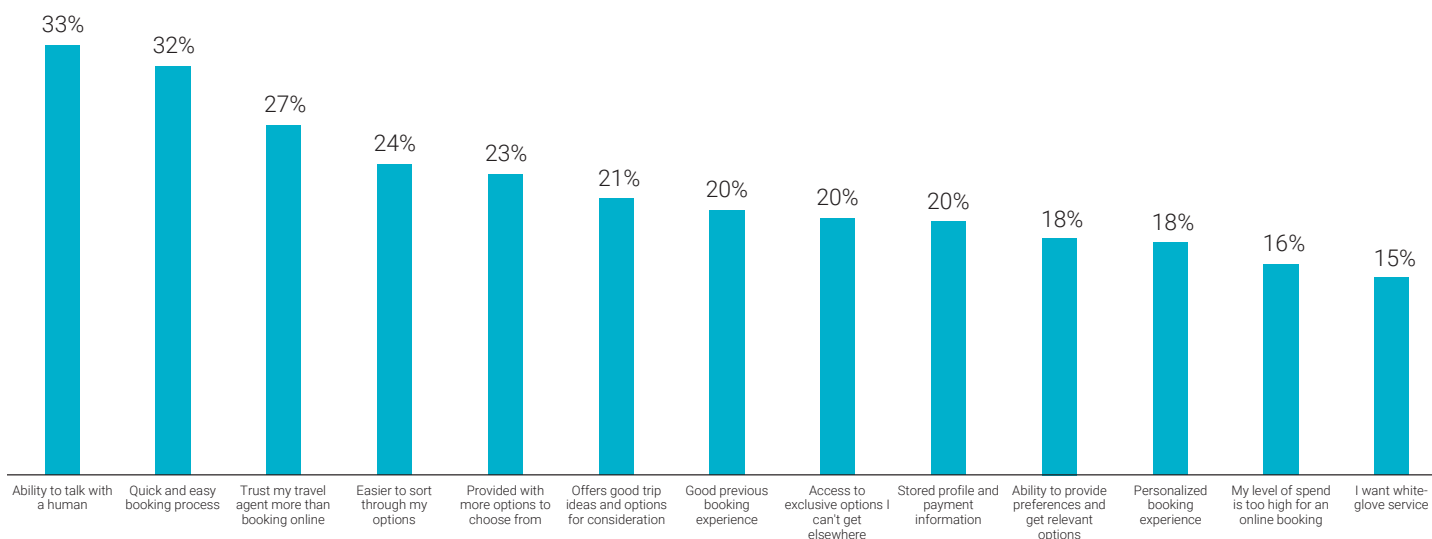
Shemain Grasso

vice president of land and strategic partnerships,
Oasis Travel Network

Maybe it involves arranging a trip for a family with four children that need frequent stops, changing tables and distractions to prevent tantrums. Remember the smaller details about your clients too to make them feel special, whether it's an upcoming birthday or a favorite welcome cocktail at the hotel restaurant.

Personal touches like these build trustworthy relationships. "Look for the perfect balance between all the tools you have, the technology, but still being able to keep a personal touch," advises Kastberg. "That way, the customer doesn't feel like a number."

Figure 9: Reasons for booking with a travel agent



Source: U.S. Consumer Travel Study, 1Q25

Conclusion

Building for the next 10 years

The pace of change in travel has never been faster, and the next decade promises to accelerate further still. As we've highlighted, traveler expectations are shifting generation by generation, geopolitical unrest continues to disrupt the globe and the technology curve is steepening.

Predicting exactly where this all leads is not easy, but many elements will remain certain.

The first is the human touch. As technology continues to do more of the transactional heavy lifting, the more valuable this becomes. Whether that's travel professionals talking with their customers or building communities through social media.

Another non-negotiable in the decade ahead will be the power of strong partnerships, which transform problems into solutions.

Finally, adaptability will become more relevant than ever. That includes using flexible technology, which allows travel professionals to connect with the most relevant suppliers. This way, travel professionals can then leverage technology to do more of what makes them human: advise, curate, reassure and deliver.





About PhocusWire

PhocusWire is a comprehensive daily news companion for the industry powered by Northstar, the leading global provider of trusted information and experiences for the audiences that drive the travel industry.

Technology and distribution form the backbone of travel, tourism and hospitality, the planet's largest industry. The PhocusWire team and our colleagues at Phocuswright have been immersed in travel technology and the ongoing digitization of the industry for decades.

PhocusWire's daily content keeps our readers up to date on breaking news while also providing broad coverage of every sector of the global travel industry, including data, expert analysis and a strategic focus on innovation and startups, all supported by Phocuswright's deep, research-driven assets.

www.phocuswire.com



About RateHawk

RateHawk is an innovative B2B booking platform developed by the Emerging Travel Group. It provides hotel bookings, airline tickets, transfers, car rentals, and other travel-related services. The platform also offers a fast and user-friendly API, and its customer support is available 24/7.

RateHawk's mission is to offer its partners the best available prices in the travel services sector, regardless of type or location.

Today, RateHawk offers its clients access to 3.2 million hotels and other types of accommodations, with direct contractual relationships in over 250,000 properties and 350 wholesalers. It also provides access to tickets from more than 450 airlines and transfers in over 150 countries.

www.ratehawk.com