

Catching a flight could soon be as easy as ordering an Uber

By Kirby Gordon

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It's 3pm on a sunny Friday afternoon and work's done for the day. A weekend of sand and surf is calling your name. You pick up your phone, click on an app and order the next flight to Durban. Saturday morning in Durbs is awesome, but you hear there's a popular street festival in Cape Town on Saturday night. So you open the same app and, with a swipe of your finger, catch a flight down to the Mother City.



@suwinai sukanant via [123RF](#)

Sounding a little far-fetched? For now - yes. But, technology has made consumers increasingly impatient. We want the freedom to do what we want, when we want, without having to plan ahead. Feel like something to eat? Open Uber Eats and you can have anything you want to be brought to you. Looking for a date on Friday night? With Tinder, hundreds of prospects are just a swipe away.

Not only are consumers impatient, but they demand efficiency and certainty. In other words, don't tell them they will be arriving at their destination at 6pm, only to delay them by an hour. They simply won't tolerate disappointment any more.

When it comes to travel specifically, consumers also want to retain control of their experiences. With FlySafair, for example, most consumers prefer to make changes to their reservations through our website rather than calling into our service centre. In other words, they want to maintain the ability to help themselves.

Airlines are under pressure to innovate

And this is a trend that is only going to grow – placing increasing pressure on the airline industry in particular. All of which makes me believe that it's only a matter of time before someone develops a different way of doing things – a model that will turn air travel on its head.

At the moment, airlines have demand-based pricing models that reward consumers who book ahead with better fares. But, in the few years since FlySafair has been in operation, we've already seen the forward-booking curve shrink, with consumers booking later and later.

It's hardly surprising when you consider how much consumers value flexibility and convenience. We expect to be able to do what we want and get what we want, immediately.

In fact, this way of thinking has already driven the disruption of many other areas of the travel industry through products like Uber and Airbnb.

Disruption has already begun

We're even starting to see elements of the sharing economy in air travel. Wingly, for example, connects passengers and pilots wanting to share charter flights, enabling them to split fuel costs and landing fees.

But, at the moment, this degree of convenience and flexibility is only available to a very small group of wealthy individuals. If we want to see this level of disruption across mass commercial flights, a number of innovations will have to take place. The most critical area pegged for change is, of course, the expense of flying.

Lower costs, quicker flying times

There's been a significant amount of conversation around the possibility of using electric planes to do away with the expense of traditional fuel and, therefore, bring down the cost of flying.

At the same time, companies like Boom are working on the introduction of ultra-fast commercial aviation, with the goal of reducing the time between destinations dramatically. Think, for example, of being able to fly from London to New York in just three hours.

When it comes to shorter distances, Uber is already holding conferences to discuss the possibility of flying taxis – another development which would undoubtedly reduce the time, hassle and cost involved in travel. And should innovations like these come to pass, it will really only be a matter of time before catching a flight is as simple and cost-effective as ordering an Uber.

Watch this space.

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