

# Digital technology changing the face of tourism

Travellers no longer need to go further than their smartphone to plan and book an entire holiday, proving how much technology has revolutionised the tourism industry. "Technology has made the hospitality, transport and tour operator sectors more efficient and competitive. These sectors have gained an international reach, with a consumer that now has a multitude of options globally for a holiday destination, literally at their fingertips," says Wiza Nyondo, Head of Tourism at FNB Business.



Wiza Nyondo

South African tourism has seen a growth rate of 3.9% in 2016 with an estimated 1.1 million new international tourists and a total of 10 million visitors in 2016, a clear indication of the potential that this sector has contributed towards job creation.

On a micro level, technology can change an organisation quite drastically, with improved turnaround times, consumer profiling, improved collections and payment systems, all of which make operating costs associated with a business far more cost effective and easier for a business to increase the number of visits to an establishment.

## Here are some trends that have changed businesses in the tourism industry:

**Hospitality loyalty cards:** The loyalty card is a stroke of genius for businesses. When consumers swipe their loyalty card it gathers data. The data over time becomes an invaluable tool that assists a business to create specials, receive feedback on their facilities and products and give targeted specials to repeat clients. If the loyalty card is used properly, the data collected can assist a business improve its offering and tailor make offerings to suit their clients' needs going forward.

**Online booking portals:** Every major airline, car rentals, couch services, hotel groups and accommodation facilities have a mobile application that allows users to book aspects of their trip via their mobile phone, from just about anywhere in the world. The ease of access enables the business to be accessible 24/7.

**Free Wi-Fi:** It is fast becoming a prerequisite and in some instances a non-negotiable for consumers. Most accommodation establishments have responded to the need by providing a capped amount of data daily. This allows the consumer a certain amount of free megabytes to use, and once those megabytes expire it prompts the consumer to buy more data should they need it.

**Social media:** The greatest benefit with social media is it affords the business an opportunity to engage consumers on platforms that they enjoy. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become household names, these platforms paired with a website or blog can enable a business to participate online, virtually at little to no setup cost – the playing field is fast becoming level, it's all fair game for businesses.

Technological advancements limit restrictions posed by location, making travel options boundless – the challenge is a balance of product/service offering and effective reach on new platforms. The business is almost compelled to be a part of the digital age and attract the new and far more tech-savvy consumer, or face the possibility of potential future business being lost concludes Nyondo.

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