The future of travel technology is better than it used to be – but perhaps further away too

Management theorist Peter Drucker famously said that "the best way to predict the future is to create it". Last week at Fitur a lot of exhibitors were very busy doing just that.

With the number of technology exhibitors up by 16% and the Fitur Tech area expanded to four stages, it seems the future of travel technology is no longer what it used to be – in a good sense.

The themes were as endless as they were inspirational: instant translation software, facial recognition profiling, cyborgs and implanted technology, chatbots, voice search, virtual and augmented reality. Apparently we´ll even see the introduction of 5G phone networks soon.

This is without mentioning the terms that are already referenced so frequently that we all feel we know them: blockchain, artificial intelligence and, the most abused term, Big Data. But does the average travel executive have much of an idea what they really mean? Or how they´ll impact our industry really?

The most important question to ask is how soon are any of these technologies likely to impact our businesses? Sadly the time lag between invention and implementation is also matched by the amount of time it takes for industry-wide uptake. At Hotelbeds Group we noticed this with regards to voice search: at a panel we hosted at World Travel Market in November we asked the audience who has used Apple´s Siri or Amazon´s Echo to actually try and book a flight or hotel. The answer? Not one of the 200 people in the audience raised their hand.

Despite the impression that gatherings of travel technologists give, it seems that we´re not quite yet living in the future. Given that we now have a privileged position of what it might look like, this gives us a perhaps unique opportunity to prepare for it. Five years from now can any hotel chain have a decent excuse as to why it doesn´t automatically charge your Bitcoin account based on facial recognition technology as you check-out by simply walking out the door? Or why the concierge doesn´t understand every known language via an instant translation software tool?

Nonetheless, some rather obvious but boring barriers need to be lifted very soon to help the travel industry maximize its potential. For example, the irony that Wi-Fi coverage was lacking – along with only a handful of ´recharging stations´, that each had literally only six plug sockets – in the IFEMA building last week did not go unnoticed.

This is something that we´ve all experienced in many tourist locations and on business trips. It´s not a sexy topic or worthy of a key note speech, but only once all travelers are able to connect and recharge everywhere, including onboard an airplane, will the travel industry start to reap the full benefits of change.

Peter Drucker died in 2005, but if he were alive today he might have also noted that the future might as well be the past if you don´t have Wi-Fi and connection to a power source.

Thumb image