

With e-commerce the whole world becomes your playground

 By Cari Van Wyk 15 Apr 2016

E-commerce has changed the game for most industries, and Tourism is no different. Today, more people will go online to book their own flights and accommodation instead of working through an agency, they will pay online using their preferred method of payment and they will do it all themselves if they can. Self-service has become the main modus operandi.



Paul Midy

Of course, the travel booking industry has had very little choice but to adapt to this disruptive trend and new innovative companies have come to the fore to meet the needs of self-service travellers. One such company is [Jovago](#), an online booking company that allows customers to browse reviews, compare rates and then book their hotel of choice. We asked Paul Midy, CEO of Jovago to share his views on e-commerce, how it changed the industry and what it means for Jovago.

What is necessary for e-commerce success?

Paul Midy: It's no doubt that the most important aspect of e-commerce is having a customer-centric approach. In any e-commerce business, customers do not have the chance to see firsthand the products services being offered and, therefore, it is important to create an environment of trust. For instance, at Jovago, we give our customers the options of comparing the best accommodation facilities from our large inventory in Africa with over 25,000 hotels. From facilities to prices, they are able to make an informed decision and we ensure that what they see on our portal is what they get at the hotels, thus guaranteeing zero or minimal discrepancies. Always make your customers come back.

Secondly, due to the popularity of e-commerce that has seen a tremendous growth in the industry, more players will continue to enter the already crowded platform. So for e-commerce to be successful, one needs to put in place measures of staying afloat of the SEO (Search Engine Optimization). To remain competitive you need to connect with all departments as they all play a key role, from IT to content creation.

How has e-commerce changed the industry?

Midy: The emergence and advancement of e-commerce have indisputably transformed almost every industry across the world, especially the travel and tourism industries. In Africa, many e-commerce platforms and startups have rapidly infiltrated the online marketplace and are being used to cause astronomical

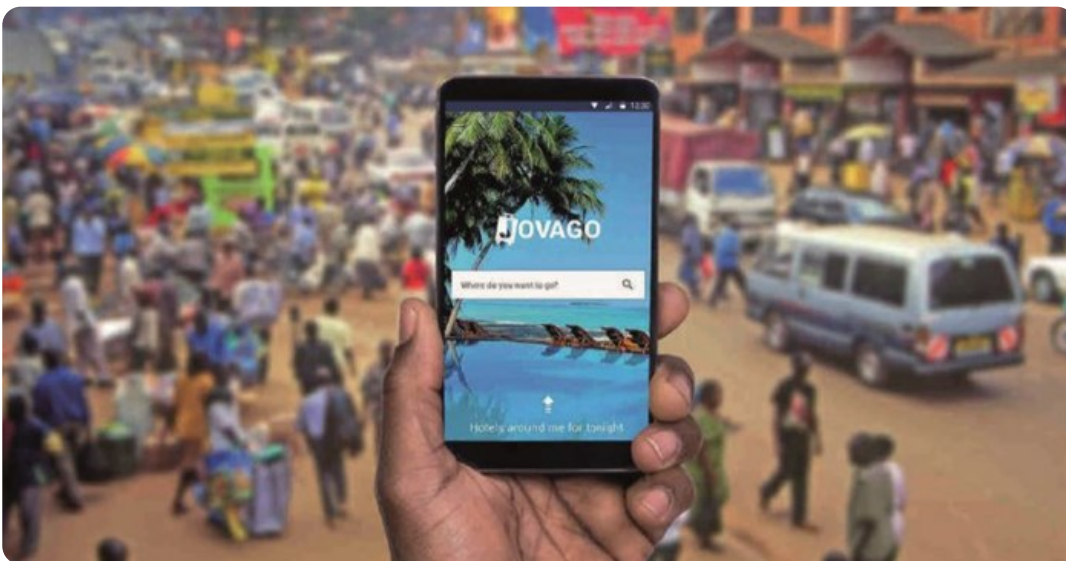
changes in profit and development.

Factors such as availability of smartphones and accessibility of internet/Wi-Fi continue to facilitate online business visibility. As a result, more business opportunities have emerged, thus creating thousands of employment opportunities in the industry. Moreover, e-commerce platforms can now reach a myriad of clients online, that otherwise could not be reached offline due to its ability to transverse beyond geographical limitations. Jovago, for instance, has created an opportunity for thousands of hotels in Africa to connect with travelers through the internet, a worthwhile experience for all our partners.

▣ ***What is the biggest challenge, for you, in dealing with e-commerce in business?***

Midy: Since inception, Jovago has fast grown and opened offices in different countries across Africa and Asia. Our inventory has grown to over 25,000 in Africa. Amid this progress, we have also experienced some challenges, among them is convincing customers that online businesses are trustworthy. There is a perception in some African countries that any business being run online is not legit, perhaps from previous fraud experiences.

The issue of online payment is also a big challenge. People feel insecure with online transactions and only prefer to pay cash or through other means familiar to them. However, over the years, we have managed to prove to our clients and hotel owners that Jovago is a trustworthy online company. For Jovago, we adapted our business to the African reality; we have, for instance, local customer services (with SMS confirmation), a translated website in Swahili and Yoruba and we adapted the online payment method as well as Mpesa or payment on arrival for our travellers. The complexity on the ground is a big challenge for us.



▣ ***What is the biggest concern, for you, in running an e-commerce platform?***

Midy: Like most e-commerce platforms, our biggest concern is to have a user friendly website for the travellers. To have a strong backup for all the technical challenges, a performing customer service to guide the customers by using, for instance, all the latest communication technologies (WhatsApp, Viber, Skype) and to secure all the payment solutions. One of the biggest challenges is to make the Jovago website visible to all the travellers in Africa.

▣ ***What are the biggest advantages of e-commerce in business?***

Midy: E-commerce is absolutely the way to go in business for this century. With it, the whole world

becomes your playground, where buyers and sellers reach each other without any geographical restriction. Businesses acquire new customers regularly, as the number of online users continues to gradually increase. Another major advantage that e-commerce holds over other types of businesses is the ability to tweak prices and reduce them to attract more customers through competitive discounts. Being online gives sellers and shops the ability to change prices with seasons or per requests and immediately convey the message to existing customers and potential customers.

Customers are able to compare prices from a wide range of service providers, thus saving time and reducing cost. Take the booking of hotels on Jovago for instance. When a guest needs a hotel to stay in a particular city, he doesn't need to physically visit eight to nine hotels to compare prices. He also doesn't need to call the entire list of hotels one after the other to make inquiries about the type of facilities and other information. A hotel booking website readily has all this information with just a few clicks. The convenience is just overwhelming.

▄ ***What are the biggest advantages Jovago's clients/customers can benefit from?***

Midy: With the largest inventory in Africa with more than 25,000 hotels, comfortable prices and top quality customer service, Jovago has ensured convenience for our African clients. The proliferation of smartphones will more than double by 2020, according to Ericsson's Mobility Report. This means that 70% of the Africa population will be using smartphones by this year. As such, billions of dollars in sales will be generated through mobile devices. This means that while we make profits, we shall have a ripple effect on our clients.

Besides, our booking hotel app helps our customers' get a perfect stay with just a click away. We are now working towards unveiling more apps to further improve user experience for existing and potential customers.

▄ ***Do you think it's absolutely necessary to have an e-commerce platform these days?***

Midy: Absolutely. Even for the businesses using offline marketing today, they should try e-commerce at some point. With a higher reach in customer catalogue, taking that route will be a rewarding experience.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

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