

Online portals go offline to boost sales

Anshul Dhamija | TNN

Bangalore: Booking your travel itinerary online has just logged off.

Today over 17,000 purchases including air-tickets, hotel stays and holiday packages are made per day as compared to 2,500 a year ago. But with people still sceptical about online transactions, internet penetration in India of just 3.5% and credit card penetration of 30 million, travel portals have ventured into offline promotions and cross-promotions to boost sales.

"For a well established travel portal, 60% sales happen offline," says an Indiatimes spokesperson.

Yatra.com's customers can book travel plans through their call centre and get their bill delivered at their doorstep. Cash-on-delivery is the portal's latest offline success, with a good number of people using the facility.

There are other issues that are forcing travel portals to shift to the offline mode. "For holiday packages that cost upwards of Rs 10,000 and holidays abroad, people are still not comfortable making online bookings," says Deep Kalra, CEO



RESTARTING ON NEW PATH

& founder, makemytrip.com. The company has regional offices in Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and are looking to open in Kolkata shortly. Doubts and queries on itineraries and destinations can be answered in person.

At Indiatimes, 95% of the international travel bookings are made by their call centre.

"One has to use large footfall areas to drive customers to your product," says Mudit Khosala, founding general manager of Yatra.com. Kiosks are becoming ubiquitous in retail spaces like Big Bazaar, Reliance Web World, BPCL and

Spencer's driving the growth in daily sales. Though such measures require investments (around 10% of the company's revenue), travel portals are witnessing phenomenal growth of 25% from their offline initiatives. In the next two months, every portal is expected to clock over 7,500 daily sales as against the current 1,000 daily sales.

Coupon, a value retail mall chain by Prateek Apparels, is planning to host a travel kiosk and is in talks with portals. "Our core concept is value. Services like travel booking in retail spaces add to the mall's consumer friendliness and loyalty," says the company's MD Pradeep Agarwal. He's looking to offer customers additional discounts on deals offered by the portal.

Offline cross promotions are also aiding growth. Yatra's tie-up with Cafe Coffee Day offers a 15-30% discount on bookings (when the bill crosses a certain amount), that can be availed by the customer both offline and online. The travel portal has similar tie-ups with Itzcash card (over 1,000 outlets) and Hughes (over 100 outlets) across India.

(With inputs from Swati Anand)