



WHITEPAPER

# TRANSFORMING TRAVEL:

THE POWER OF AI-DRIVEN  
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>A New Era of Travel Personalization in the Age of AI</b>	3
1. Deep Diving Into Data and Analytics	5
2. Implementing AI-Led Experiences	9
3. Creating Digital Chemistry: The Powerful Synergy of Human Touch and AI	12
<b>Accelerate Your Travel Transformation Journey With Sutherland</b>	15





## A NEW ERA OF TRAVEL PERSONALIZATION IN THE AGE OF AI

### AI has landed in travel.

Set to improve every stage of the traveler experience—from planning and booking all the way through to the post-trip service—while also driving operational efficiencies, streamlining logistics and more, it is no surprise 80% of providers plan to increase their use of AI in the next 12 months.<sup>1</sup>

With the lessons of years gone by still being heard loud and clear, travel leaders know there's no room for inaction. Against the backdrop of escalating costs, inflationary pressures, and socioeconomic uncertainties, shifting to an asset-light and more efficient operating model has never been more important. Yet at the same time, travelers today demand hyper-personalization and convenience and are rejecting one-size-fits-all solutions.

*Given 71% of customers expect personalized interactions, and 76% become frustrated when this doesn't happen, getting AI adoption right to deliver personalized experiences at scale is vital for maintaining a competitive edge.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> <https://travelweekly.co.uk/news/tour-operators/more-than-half-of-travel-companies-plan-ai-investment-survey-finds>





AI-led transformation is likely to happen at a much faster pace than previous digital initiatives as a result. Especially given how AI will help transform front- and back-office functions in a way that can address the hurdles the industry must overcome—lowering costs while maintaining competitiveness. However, while the advantage AI brings to travel is evident, the question that remains is how should travel companies leverage this technology to its full potential?

After all, if AI adoption is set to be ubiquitous, standing out among a sea of competition and becoming a true travel partner of the future will come down to how this technology is applied.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/growth-marketing-and-sales/our-insights/the-value-of-getting-personalization-right-or-wrong-is-multiplying>

## Travel Providers Must Unlock the Full Value of AI

From personalized travel concierges to proactive disruption management, AI is already helping reshape and redefine the travel experience. But it can go much further.

AI-enabled solutions can foster seamless integration across all service providers in a travel journey, creating a truly cohesive, customer-centric experience that saves time and offers ubiquitous connectivity.

Rapid advancements in AI are enabling companies to unlock new possibilities for enhancing the traveler experience, increasing customer satisfaction and creating new avenues for revenue growth.

To craft unforgettable, standout journeys that foster lasting customer loyalty through personalized, intelligent interactions, it is imperative to focus on three interconnected strategies:



1. Diving into data and analytics to derive actionable intelligence



2. Implementing AI-led experiences that enhance customer engagement



3. Integrating the strengths of AI with human touchpoints

This whitepaper aims to guide travel brands through these pivotal focus areas in their AI adoption, implementation, and transformation journey.



# 1. DEEP DIVING INTO DATA AND ANALYTICS

Data is the foundation of AI-led transformation—and the sector has an abundance of it. From loyalty programs to historical customer bookings, past interactions, surveys and more, travel brands already have a good view of what makes their customers tick.

Add real-time data to the mix and the potential for delivering highly tailored and personalized interactions increases exponentially. And AI-enabled analytics will take this even further to drive value across the business.



Today, there is an ever-growing array of analytics that travel brands can leverage to analyze data at every stage of the travel journey. These include:



## Experience analytics

Analyzing the user experience as they interact with various touchpoints along the customer journey.



## Contact center analytics

Collecting, processing, and evaluating call data to track and monitor key performance metrics and improve outcomes.



## Customer analytics

Monitoring customer behavior data to inform decision-making through predictive analytics.



## Marketing analytics

Gathering and analyzing campaign data to optimize effectiveness and improve ROI.







## Turning Data Into Actionable Intelligence

AI-powered analytics are the next frontier of transformation in travel. The market is growing rapidly, with the global tourism industry's big data analytics segment expected to reach

**\$486.6** billion by 2033

— rising from

**\$225.4** billion in 2023<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/big-data-analytics-in-tourism-overview-and-trends-analysis>

Harnessing the power of data and AI-powered analytics is helping brands utilize relationship-driven metrics such as lifetime value and basket size to deliver segmented, hyper-personalized services. Making a success of AI-powered analytics means prioritizing end-to-end excellence: gathering data at each stage of the customer lifecycle, connecting and integrating it, then using that insight to formulate and implement the best action at each customer experience touchpoint. This will allow travel brands to engage with customers using the sum of their interactions with the company, rather than each connection/experience being treated in isolation.



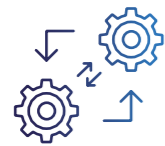


Harnessing these insights can also deliver value in areas that affect the overall experience beyond order fulfillment. For example, booking data and other information that brands hold can be harnessed to enable data-driven decision making for strategy and product management.

The knock-on effect of leveraging AI in this way is significant. It can enable:



**Dynamic pricing:** Analyzing vast data sets allows travel providers to dynamically adjust pricing on demand, optimizing revenue and conversion.



**Supercharged product management:** Collating data from across departments to identify new product opportunities in response to changes in market demand, enabling faster roll-out and greater business agility.

In doing so, travel brands can deliver an experience that exceeds expectation while simultaneously leveraging data to unlock a strategic business advantage. However, as this is dependent on having a unified data layer in place, it can be easier said than done.

## Leveraging AI for Real-Time Analysis

Analytics allows companies to turn a sea of data around preferences, behavior, and purchasing habits—in addition to trends, patterns, and market dynamics—into actionable intelligence.

Real-time analysis allows travel brands to craft personalized services and offerings, improve customer support, and even predict potential disruptions or issues.

*In fact, 77.5% of companies report they are driving innovation through data and analytics, with generative AI acting as an impetus for change.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wavestone.com/app/uploads/2023/12/DataAI-ExecutiveLeadershipSurveyFinalAsset.pdf>



## The Barriers to Data Success

Data alone does not drive business value, particularly when it remains siloed across different departments that are each reliant on legacy systems and infrastructure, hindering collaboration and deep insight. In an environment like this, travel brands cannot effectively leverage unstructured, fragmented data to differentiate and deliver personalized travel experiences—or to drive value across the business.

Many struggle to fully harness the data they hold due to resource constraints in collating, processing, and analyzing it to uncover valuable insights. However, by integrating systems to avoid information silos, then leveraging AI to analyze datasets, recognize patterns, and better anticipate traveler preferences, providers can unlock the full value of their data for better decision-making, transforming it into actionable intelligence.

This is the key to providing a next-level, highly personalized customer experience—one that can not only deliver improvements and optimizations in real time, but also look ahead to better anticipate customer needs.

Travel providers are leaning into the capabilities offered by AI to expedite the creation of solutions across the entire data management lifecycle, from data extraction to improving data completeness, accuracy, and validity to derive deeper insights.

To fully capitalize on this capability, they must establish and adhere to a robust data governance framework focused on accessibility, quality, connectivity, and security. By doing so, travel brands can ensure they derive maximum value from their data assets while maintaining integrity and reliability across operations.



*Despite those in the travel sector recognizing the wealth of customer data at their disposal, 40% don't feel they are currently using it to its full potential.<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> <https://d1.awsstatic.com/asset-repository/Sia%20Partners%20-%20IATA%20-%20data-study-strategy2.pdf>





## 2. IMPLEMENTING AI-LED EXPERIENCES

Across every stage of the traveler journey, travel providers have been increasingly leveraging technology to drive a more optimal and cost-effective experience. Integrating advanced AI capabilities opens up even more possibilities for delivering standout experiences before, during, and after travel.



The initial focus on AI in travel has centered on the booking experience. By leveraging AI to analyze vast amounts of data, brands are developing solutions that provide each traveler with tailored recommendations precisely aligned with their preferences and needs.



Furthermore, advanced technology and streamlined processes allow travelers to spend less time on planning, navigating airports, or waiting in lines, thereby maximizing their journey enjoyment. With AI managing many logistical and administrative tasks, travelers can focus more on the experience itself, leading to increased satisfaction and loyalty.

Leading brands are increasingly adopting AI to optimize various aspects of the traveler journey. This includes network optimization, disruption management, accelerated check-ins using facial recognition, breaking down language barriers at each step, and providing instant support and recommendations through chatbots and virtual assistants. These applications enhance operational efficiency and create a smoother, more enjoyable travel experience from start to finish.

In recent months, there has been a significant focus on integrating

both traditional and generative AI to drive efficiencies across the travel ecosystem, including streamlining the agent and employee experience across all departments. By automating labor-intensive processes and analyzing data at scale, **AI augments human efforts and frees up time to focus on high-value tasks or more complex support cases.**

It is increasingly evident that deploying technology-led solutions across front-, mid-, and back-office functions enhances both the overall user experience and business performance. Consequently, travel brands must strategically implement AI solutions to deliver optimal results and effectively meet evolving customer expectations.

Embracing these advancements is not just a competitive advantage but a necessary step to stay relevant and exceed customer demands in a rapidly evolving industry.

### For travel companies today, AI capabilities can deliver:



Around-the-clock care and support, with machine learning enabling continuous training to understand behavior patterns and craft a customized experience with instant responses.



Simpler, streamlined fare quotes and booking processes through integration with fare quote engines, and order management and payment systems.



Bespoke travel packages tailored to their customers' individual tastes and preferences, increasing conversion and retention rates.



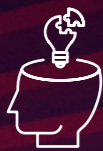
## Key takeaways for the successful implementation of AI:



**A robust technological layer:** With nearly 40% of travel executives reporting their number one priority for infrastructure investments in 2024 is the upkeep of existing legacy systems, technology modernization has reached a critical juncture.<sup>6</sup> Legacy systems often prevent the unified visibility that's needed for AI-led transformation to succeed. App modernization can help overcome this, making strategic changes to existing systems to prevent data silos in support of an omnichannel customer experience.



**Truly know your customers:** Capitalizing on unified data flows from across systems—and using AI to structure and process it, with robust data governance—will enable travel companies to cut through the noise and better predict customer behavior.



**Navigate organizational inertia:** The brands that prove most successful will be those with a clear transformation roadmap. This includes fostering a culture of innovation, bringing together people, processes, and technology for a digitally-enabled travel experience that delivers measurable business outcomes.

<sup>6</sup> <https://skift.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-2023-Digital-Transformation-Report-Skift-and-AWS-FINAL.pdf>





CASE STUDY

## 90% Faster Onboarding: Tech-Led Customer Experience in Action

For a major travel service provider, heavy reliance on manual document verification had become more than just an operational headache. It was damaging the user experience they had worked so hard to build.

Onboarding new providers was a painfully manual (not to mention expensive) process. And weeding out unreliable ones was just as difficult, negatively impacting the timely and secure experience travelers had come to expect.

Sutherland developed a tailored AI-driven KYC solution to solve the problem. Bringing automation to document assessment and classification, automated validations could happen at scale with stringent checks applied—significantly reducing manual effort and removing bad actors from the start.

60%

*Effort reduction*

90%

*Faster onboarding*

70%

*Increase in fake  
ID detection*



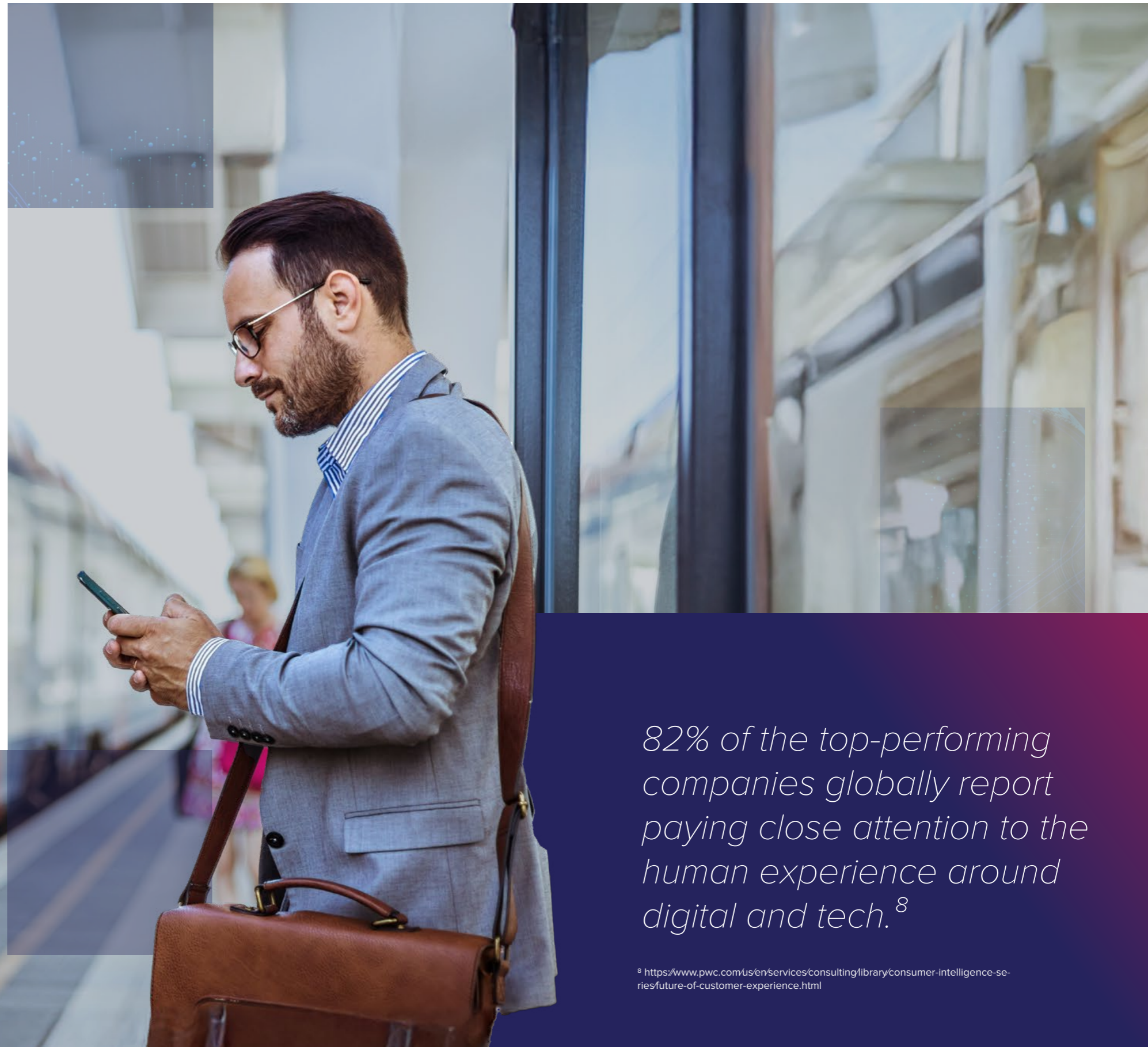


### 3. CREATING DIGITAL CHEMISTRY: THE POWERFUL SYNERGY OF HUMAN TOUCH AND AI

With such rapid progression, there is no doubt AI capabilities can reinvent experiences, optimize critical business operations, and pioneer new solutions in industries like travel, hospitality, and logistics.

But the value and holistic impact of human supervision and involvement remains unparalleled. With **only 52% of Millennials and 51% of Gen Z saying that they are willing to turn to AI for assistance**, human interaction is still a priority.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hotelmanagement-network.com/news/ai-vs-human-touch-travellers?cf-view>



*82% of the top-performing companies globally report paying close attention to the human experience around digital and tech.<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/future-of-customer-experience.html>



*Almost **90%** of travelers believe human interaction is crucial when making travel bookings, especially when needing assistance or contacting customer support.*

***35%** consider human interaction very important for flight and hotel bookings.*

***29%** believe live customer service agents work best for itinerary planning.<sup>9</sup>*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.hotelmanagement-network.com/news/ai-vs-human-touch-travellers/>

Integrating a collaborative Human in the Loop (HITL) approach delivers added value to AI-driven customer experience strategies. **While AI can analyze data and provide recommendations, human agents bring empathy, creativity, and situational awareness.**

This combination allows for a truly personalized service, as agents can interpret and act on AI insights with a deeper understanding of the customer's needs. For instance, AI might suggest a hotel upgrade based on a customer's loyalty status, but a human agent can ensure the upgrade aligns with the customer's specific preferences and past experiences, thereby enhancing overall satisfaction and loyalty.

Together, AI and human intelligence facilitate enriched support, scale, efficiency, consistency, and speed. More travel and hospitality brands are leveraging AI to equip room service, crew, and ground support staff with the insights that enable a more meaningful, personalized customer experience. AI-augmented tools are transforming customer support agent experiences, creating opportunities to up-sell and cross-sell throughout the travel journey, from booking to usage.

Agents empowered by AI enhance customer engagement with high-value information at their fingertips: individual preferences, previous interactions, and current travel intentions aligned with personal preferences.

Maximizing the potential of AI in travel, therefore, means delivering synergies between AI capabilities and human expertise to ensure travelers not only receive a seamless service but personalized attention and care, fostering deeper connections and loyalty.

Successfully integrating AI and human expertise requires travel brands to implement next-generation technology, optimize operational processes, and empower their workforce. By striking a **balance between automation and human engagement**, brands can deliver exceptional service, resolve complex issues, and create memorable experiences that resonate with travelers long after their journey concludes. This harmonious blend defines the future of travel, promising enhanced efficiency, satisfaction, and loyalty.





CASE STUDY

**75% Reduction  
in Manual Effort:  
Leveraging AI to Boost  
Employee Output**

For a global online travel agency, every step of supplier management—from initial onboarding to product review and beyond—was handled manually. Not only was this slow and expensive, but long delays in getting products listed was impacting supplier satisfaction.

To address the problem, Sutherland designed an intelligent AI bot to act as a co-pilot for employees. Continually learning from production scenarios, the bot integration streamlined end-to-end supplier management, automating product review and listing processes to drive efficiencies and time savings.

---

75%

*Effort  
reduction*

90%

*Accuracy compared  
to manually processed  
product listings*

50%

*Reduction to  
review time*



# ACCELERATE YOUR TRAVEL TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY WITH SUTHERLAND



Travel experiences of the future will continue to evolve rapidly, and AI technologies will only become more prevalent. Brands must take action today to stay ahead of the curve. Delivering personalized, technology-led travel experiences will help give your business a competitive edge—enabling you to leverage industry disruption to your advantage, rather than being subjected to it.

Embracing AI-led transformation will attract new travelers, build loyalty, and unlock high levels of engagement among existing customers. And while there is no shortcut to success, the right roadmap and partner can make this journey much smoother.

With our unique combination of market-leading technology and a relentless focus on innovation, Sutherland is the ideal partner for travel businesses looking to benefit from AI capabilities.

We understand your business and the industry you operate in. In turn, this allows us to tailor proven and rapid formulas to fit your unique DNA. We bring together human expertise and artificial intelligence to develop digital chemistry that unlocks new possibilities, transformative outcomes, and enduring relationships.





# IN SUMMARY

## The Sutherland difference:



**A trusted partner to global brands.** \$1B+ revenue generated for travel clients.



**Deep domain expertise.** 30M+ omnichannel customer interactions and 190M+ back-office transactions handled.



**Industry-leading innovation.** 200+ unique inventions under several patents across AI and emerging technologies, with several proprietary platforms tailored to the sector.



**Outcome-based partnership model.** With our outcome-based contracts, we win when you win.

Get in touch to learn more about how Sutherland can help you create the **personalized, seamless, efficient,** and **intelligent** travel experiences that will deliver measurable results.

## AUTHOR



**Suresh Manwani**  
Client Partner, Travel, Hospitality  
and Transportation



**Unlocking Digital Performance.**  
Delivering Measurable Results.

At Sutherland, we are a leading global business and digital transformation partner. We work with iconic brands worldwide in Healthcare, Insurance, Banking & Financial Services, Communications, Media & Entertainment, Technology, Travel & Hospitality, Logistics, Retail, Energy & Utilities industries. We bring our clients a unique value proposition through market-leading technology and business process excellence. Leveraging our advanced products and platforms, we drive digital transformation, optimize critical business operations, reinvent experiences, and pioneer new solutions, all provided through a seamless “as a service” model. For each company, we tailor proven and rapid formulas to fit their unique DNA. We bring together human expertise and artificial intelligence. In short, we do digital chemistry. It unlocks new possibilities, great client partnerships, and transformative outcomes.

[sutherlandglobal.com](https://sutherlandglobal.com)

