

Q&A with Airbnb: Why the search for new users isn't about search marketing

Article



Insider Intelligence spoke with Hiroki Asai, global head of marketing at Airbnb, about recent marketing campaigns addressing inflation's impact on the travel industry and the brand's shift away from search and performance-based marketing.

II: Why did Airbnb pivot from search marketing and toward brand campaigns?

Asai: We're looking to the app to create features, and to our teams to create features for the app to solve those things. We are different in that we don't use brand marketing to talk about the concept of our brand and to sell our brand, instead we use brand marketing to educate people on our innovations and the problems that our product solves [like with our new Airbnb Setup, which helps new hosts get started, along with new functionalities on our app like guest identify verification and reservation screening technology].

Editor's note: *Airbnb's revenues were up 29% year over year, in spite of an inflationary environment, and the brand attributes its success to a shift from search and performance-based marketing toward brand-oriented ad campaigns. US travel search ad spending is expected to decline, per our forecasts, and Airbnb has taken a proactive step in cutting overall ad spend to secure its status as a key player within the travel industry.*

II: As the world feels the effects of inflation, how is Airbnb attracting both guests and hosts?

Asai: One thing that we've done, which is different from anyone else in the industry or actually across technology, is we've built all of our creative and advertising services in-house. We take a look at the key features and capabilities that guests and hosts are looking for out of Airbnb and design features and capabilities against that, using the marketing and the advertising to talk about those things and educate people about them. Airbnb Categories, allowing guests to choose from curated collections of homes [like tiny homes, for example], was a good first example of this work, and Airbnb Setup is our next venture.

On the marketing side, we had this key insight, which is that most people already have an Airbnb, they just don't know it. When you go on vacation, you don't just have this empty house that's sitting there for two weeks empty, you actually have an Airbnb. We have a whole campaign that's really kind of delightful and magical that really outlines and illustrates all these use cases and educates people that you probably already have an Airbnb.

II: What campaigns have you launched to try to get more hosts on Airbnb?

Asai: We've been seeing a huge return to hosting—last year we had our most lucrative year ever for our hosts. There is a big swing in people turning to hosting, which usually happens in tough economic times because it's a great way to earn extra money. The current challenges for people becoming a host is that hosts need some help getting started, as they don't know quite what to do and could use some guidance.

We are putting out Airbnb Setup, which is a new setup process for new hosts that is completely guided and lets a host become matched with a super host who lives in their area. As an example, if I'm looking to host my home in San Francisco or my spare bedroom, I'll get matched with someone who's done the same and they can answer all my questions.

We're also adding in the ability for a new host to host a guest that's experienced, a guest that's stayed on Airbnb a number of times and has no major incidents on their record to make sure that they have a great first experience.

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