

September 28, 2005
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All European Online Travel Buyers Not Created Equal

They access many of the same travel sites and visit many of the same places, but European online travel buyers differ in the ways they purchase their holiday travel.

According to findings from PhoCusWright's Online Travel Shopping and Buying Behavior: Key European Markets Survey, 8 out of 10 U.K. online travelers use the Internet as the main way they purchase travel. But e-commerce barriers and embedded habits make German and French travelers more likely to use offline methods as well.

The PhoCusWright survey was conducted in July 2005 to gauge the shopping and buying habits of online travel buyers **across three of Europe's largest online travel markets - U.K., Germany and France**. Sherman, CT-based PhoCusWright Inc. is an independent travel, tourism and hospitality research firm specializing in consumer, business and competitive intelligence.

Online travel buyers in Germany and France are more likely to use a combination of online and offline channels than are U.K. buyers.

In Germany, for example, 68% of online travel buyers are not committed to the Internet and use multiple methods for purchasing travel.

That compares to only 40% in the U.K. who use multiple methods. Reasons for the disparity include the high volume of airline tickets purchased online via U.K. low-cost carriers, which lifts Internet usage overall.

In Germany and France, many online travel buyers still use traditional travel agencies and tour operators. Even among these online travel buyers, for example, 20% of the German and 27% of the French purchased travel in person in the past year (compared to 9% in the U.K.), indicating buying behavior steeped in tradition.

Other results from PhoCusWright's Online Travel Shopping and Buying Behavior survey:

- On average, European online travel buyers search 4.76 Web sites before purchasing leisure travel. This propensity is significantly higher among German buyers (mean rating: 5.09).
- Nearly half of all online travel buyers in the U.K., Germany and France purchased packaged tours in the past year, and 70% of those travelers purchased them online.
- Online travel buyers purchase holiday travel from airlines more often than from any other travel source. However, this dominant position is slipping as more travelers choose online agencies and tour operator Web sites for longer-stay travel.

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The purpose of the Online Travel Shopping and Buying Behavior: Key European Markets survey is to gather information about the travel shopping and purchasing behaviors of "online travel buyers" in the U.K., Germany and France markets.

Online travel buyers were defined as those who have purchased air/rail and hotel (3+ nights) in the past year, and were invited to participate using Greenfield Online, a global online Web panel whose members are recruited for research purposes. To qualify for this study, respondents had to indicate if they had 1) personally taken any trips by commercial airline or rail in the last 12 months, 2) personally stayed at a hotel for a 3+ night holiday in the last 12 months, and 3) personally purchased airline, rail or hotel online for a holiday in last 12 months. A total of 600 interviews were completed, averaging eight minutes in length