

## Ethnographic Interview and Task Analysis – Airlines booking

I have often gone into the field to observe and interview actual customers, software users and subject matter experts in the environments where they actually use the products being developed or improved. Here is an interview that I have re-created from many travel reservation customer contacts I have had to illustrate the interview process and some of its unexpected results.

### Preparation

Travel time can be a significant project expense. To make the most of it, I plan interviews with product planners, PM, subject matter experts, designers and others on the product team. This ensures that I will capture customer information about issues of concern to the team. For the interviews, I would prepare open and closed ended questions and possibly a survey as well with some standardized questions and responses. If I am in a leadership role, I may prepare interview guidelines and procedures and may conduct interview training for other team members who are also interviewing.

### A simulated interview

Interviewer Question	Participant Response	Comment
Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed today. We are here to learn about how people plan for trips and all of the events they do when they travel	Glad to help out. You say this will take about an hour, right?	
Yes. Do you have any other commitments near the end of the interview?	Well, about 20 minutes afterwards, I have to go shopping with a friend.	
Ok. Let's begin. You've already signed the non-disclosure documents and waivers. I've got your survey here. It shows that you take about three vacations per year on average.		Participants can be given a survey before hand to gather basic information in a standardized format.
Can you tell me what those trips are for? Kind of why you travel then?	We take one family vacation each year. I have an annual work trip that my husband comes along with and turns into a short vacation and we are big fans of the football team. So we go to one of their games in the post season. Depending on money we may take an outdoorsy kind of trip. You know, for skiing, hiking, stuff like that. Oh, and we rotate visit either his family or mine on Thanksgiving, or Christmas.	The observer should notice that the subject has identified additional trips that she indicated in the survey.
How do you typically plan these trips?	Well, depending on who is going? We will talk about what we might like to do on the trip. Places to see, parks, local events, We know a lot of these because we visit some of the same places each year.  We might go online and check out travel bureaus for the cities we're going to. We might call our friends or relatives and find out what's happening when we might be traveling.  Once we were booking online and actually found a promotion for an event at a place we had not heard of and it was close to	Much of trip planning can happen off line and could be based on some online activities.  Trip making is probably more fully engaged online. Trip planning may be mainly off line and may tail off into trip making and trip taking.

	where my parents live.	
So, it seems like you and whoever is going talk out what you might do in addition to your main purpose for the trip? Is that correct?	Yeah. Mostly. It's not like we go to a travel agent's office and book a vacation. We're not rich. We do it ourselves to save money.	
From what you are saying, it seems that you don't get online by yourself to plan a trip and make reservations.  It's kind of a group process that could take several days. And you talk to family or friends you are visiting or to business people you've got to deal with as well.	Absolutely. The only kind of trip I book by myself is a business trip and even then I coordinate with Bob if he is coming along for a mini-vacation.  Sometimes we cluster around the computer. Other times, all of us do our own looking and get together to hash out options. It's gotten a lot more involved now that the kids are in their teens. I'm lucky if I actually get to go to the main place or people I'm traveling to see.	The character of the person booking / planning the trip changes with their family's age composition. No one persona fits all situations even for the same "person."
So you are making decisions about where to go and what to do before you get online. Is that right?	Yes, it is. We're flexible. We don't want to be bored or do the same thing too often. So we keep our options open and don't book 100% of our time.  Like I say, we've actually responded to some of the advertising on travel sites. They have so many things to choose from.	Most user research for online eCommerce is concerned with user behavior when they are online. My research shows that many customers conduct several stages of their shopping process offline, intermittently
This might be a good time to ask you about your experiences on travel web sites.  Could you explain that a bit more?	Honestly, my experience is different depending on why I am going there. When I've got a trip for the family I'm more open to choices and promotions. But when I'm booking a trip we do every year, it's kind of annoying to have their marketing people pushing every trip they've got in my face.	
	And for business trips, I don't want to see any of that stuff, except maybe til the end. Just let me get the trip set and then deal with any extra free time.	The user's experience varies depending on their purpose, interests and needs for the particular trip they are taking.
	You know, you talk about trip planning like it is something you do before the trip, then have the trip, then come home.  The way we are, I'm planning the trip the whole time I'm on the trip.	
Could you tell me about how you shop online for trips you are planning? Kind of your typical steps.	Sure. So before I start, I know who is traveling.  I know why we are making the trip and if we will need a vehicle and a place to stay.  I have a general idea of other things we might do when we are there. I may have some specific requests from the kids.  I have a pretty close idea of my or our primary purpose and what arrangements I have to make for that purpose.	
	I'll either do this alone or with my husband. It depends on the kind of trip and how much arguing there has been about what to	

	do	
	I'll get online and go to my favorite travel site.	
	I've got to give the trip information. I like to use the sites that tell me about cheaper seats or available seats if my flight dates are flexible.	
	I'd really like to enter the least information to start pricing trips. I know the actual fare is going to vary depending on the number of adults and kids, but I'd just like to get the far for one person first for pricing and comparisons.	
	So I enter the city I'm leaving from and the one I want to go to. I don't have much choice about that. Although sometimes we do have a choice of another airport. I'd like to know if the other airport has a flight at a better cost or availability when the one I'm trying to get isn't available. You know, or costs too much.	
	Usually they want to know the dates. Except for business travel, I've usually got some flex in my dates. With kids in school, we are more limited that when it is just Bob and me.  I like the calendars that pop up especially with the days and dates. I need to know what day of the week each date is.	
	Usually next I enter the times we want to leave. It's so silly these sites show every hour. When you get results you are going to see all hours anyway. I'd be happy with a choice to enter an exact time or just to see options like morning, early afternoon, late afternoon, early evening and late evening. I expect they will give me a range of flights before and after any "exact" times. I wouldn't expect to not see a 2:59 flight if I said show me late afternoon – 3:00 to 6:00.	
	So once I've entered the flight information for our trip, I'd just like to see the fares and flights. Like I said I'd like to see the fares for one adult person, then when we start reserving seats I would include all the others. This is when I am shopping.	
	I'll pick the fare I want for departure, choose my seats. Sometimes they can't guarantee the seat. I really need to know if the seat they give me is confirmed or standby. Because we are a family, we want to sit together or Bob and I and the kids together. If they are arguing we may have to separate them. So it's is good if we can say who gets what seat when choosing seats. See now I'm not shopping. I'm making a purchase. But I can still go back to shopping if I need to.	
	I'll pick the return leg. Again, I want to compare. A lot of airlines share flights. I think this is called codesharing. I want to see other airlines as well as the one I started on.	
	Then we choose seats again.	
	Throughout all of that, I want to know if there are any better deals, flight, or seat availability if I can flex my dates or times. Sometimes I can flex times. Sometimes I can flex dates by one or two days. I don't want to have to go back and redo my search; I just want the site to tell me if anything better is available. I might want to be able to tell it to go and look when I'm not getting what I want.	
	The account management page tells me if it can get any discount off of my current planned trip. I've used that a few times. I check for any discounts and get back to the checkout	
	I choose the card I want to use, bring up the account information and make the purchase.	
	The site confirms my purchase and shows me the itinerary. It gives me a printable page for it and tells me that it is sending an	

	email to the address I used in my profile. I told the profile to always send me an email to home and work.	
	Now that I've purchased the flight I would go back in to the site for the extras that are not time sensitive: rental cars, hotels, vacation and sport events, tours, etc., all that kind of stuff.	
	I would start with rental cars, as I've had a few occasions on holidays when it has been hard to get one.	
	**** interview would continue through other task flows*****	
It is just about 5 minutes until our scheduled ending time. You've been very informative and I really appreciate being able to meet with you today. Here is the compensation we discussed. This is a free airline ticket for anywhere in the U.S. on Airlines for one person. You can combine this with other tickets and other discounts. Thanks for letting me visit you today.		