

Road Trip New York City

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Just like in IPT, traveling involves a great deal of planning. An end of year trip was to the Big Apple and here's what I did to get there and what I did once I got there--speaking of technology of course.

AMTRAK was my choice of travel and reservations were made online easily--no ticket agent required and I upgraded the trip to the city to business class for a few dollars more and on the return I splurged to enjoy the ride on the Acela Express. Using the Times Square [EarthCam](#) I attempted to get a sense of the area--yes, it was busier than what is shown because of the holiday and shopping incentives and madness of celebration.

Our hotel reservations were online through Hilton Honors and it was a breeze finding a place to stay--Times Square, but their website is a kluge --in and out of different systems/databases with credentials expiring along the way. Next, I used OpenTable to make most of our dining reservations and the return emails from their system imported easily to both my calendar (desktop) and iPhone. The main attractions that we wanted to visit were booked online using TicketMaster. Their site could use improvement because I ended up juggling between them and the hotel to determine best seats/best prices--beware of online ticket huckstering. I made numerous calls to the hotel on and off again speaking with either the front desk or concierge about questions of some finer details that you can't find on the web. Of course these calls were via SIP. Since I am the delegated family travel coordinator aka Travel Agent, I can say that over the years, the Internet has eased my pain but not the burden.



Getting to New York was fun with an iPhone on hand to answer my daughter's question, "where are we now?" Using the Google app, our location was pinpointed with accuracy. The iPhone photos are also tagged with GPS data that is very cool especially for purposes of documentation, and I can think of numerous applications. My iPhone is the old iPhone model (please don't say last generation) and the onboard camera and audio recording both lack quality. Later after arriving, I ended up canceling a couple of reservations for diner using the embedded links in the original OpenTable email (giving me options). Since we were running late, the concierge desk at the hotel remedied getting a good reservation, table and time. The "people connection" will always prevail and outlive/outperform the best of any technology.

My onboard RDP (Remote Desktop Client) on my iPhone remained unused during the entire visit and I responded to a couple of emails for information. What I should say take for granted is the convenience of using the technology. When I thought about it a little further, the tools are just like hooks and the better the hook--the more likely it is to get snagged. I don't mean in the negative sense either, because the tools made it easy to do business.

Some of the tours in museums and the Empire State building offer audio devices (oversized flip phones) to learn more about the details of the display or attraction. I wondered why not enable a radio frequency on smart phones? Since most people carry their cells, why not converge and this would mean less burden on museums and touring sites, less costs and less hardware to maintain. Automobile car radios can tune to certain frequencies for road conditions--what's up with smart phones? At the sky deck on the Empire State building, the audio commentary stated that since 9/11, some of the former communications capabilities at the World Trade Center were moved back to the Empire State building. (see digital camera photo)

The amount of time I spend as a Travel Agent using the Internet and tools available, means much less time on the phone sitting in queues that are least productive. When I do call, it's usually for obtaining targeted information. Staff members of numerous establishments removed guesswork out of the process, so be wary considering that eliminating or replacing people with more tools isn't necessarily the answer or right marketing mix.

The important thing for everyone to understand is that, as more traffic shifts to mobile, so will the costs. Maybe it's un-cool to have landlines at home but landlines serve to get reliable communications when needed--not talking to someone on the cell, repeating or missing key information or worse, acting on the misinformation. This may prove to be the next unraveling of cell services coupled with the inability to connect on the first time or to obtain data with speed and accuracy.

Then, for most mobile devices today, are they are headed for the scrap yard tomorrow? Does your mobile device stick? In other words, does it get the job done, easily and fast enough? Can you get hooked on using your device in lieu of a landline, PC and other devices? Maybe you have the latest and greatest mobile device but are the websites, databases and business processes mobile device friendly? Are your business processes kicking your customers on the backend or providing them with the right information to make the right choices on the front end?

The manufacturers of the devices need to provide more than they did yesterday. Because of what smart phones can do or should be able to do, are we headed towards the \$1,000 device? Or can we expect because of sheer numbers and technology curves that the devices will go the other direction in cost--near or below \$100? Will Verizon's deployment of LTE differentiate them? If you missed Michael Finneran's post Mobile Predictions for 2010 then you may want to review it carefully. You see, mobility comes with a cost and it's not exactly in plain view.

I remember the days of throwing my mobile phone out the window and going into a frenzy about carriers. The thing is, I don't do that (out the window) anymore--namely because these "smart phones" are too expensive. As traffic and business processes interact more with the mainstream and the move of users over to wireless expands, it will be interesting to see whether or not folks respond as I did in the past (I wasn't alone) or if they come up with something new. Either way, be prepared for the new wave because having good hooks isn't optional and for enterprise--all you do must be mobile ready, friendly and sticking so customers don't walk and direct their frenzy towards you. While customers appear to be accepting of poor carrier connections I can't help but wonder if there's going to be an eventual backlash of folks pitching their cell phones (out the window) and ditching vendors.

The Big Apple is quite a place and normally I'd notice details about desk phones and systems (Blue Man Group uses Nortel Norstar), but it seems this trip was more about mobility and convenience--the two of such are dangerous ingredients for higher prices.