

“I always say a cheap vacation can still be a very expensive mistake.”

in the offline world,: Travel agency technology

By Mitra Sorrells |

Like any industry, travel has been profoundly changed by advancements in technology. How people research, book and experience a trip is completely different than it was just 20 years ago.

Travel is inherently about a physical experience.

Travel is about seeing, doing, tasting, touching, meeting.

It's about human interaction.

“As agents, we can't possibly have been everywhere, but when you put us together, we can say, ‘Who's been to this resort?’ and get real feedback from a travel agent point of view.”

Johnson has also seen an increase in the tools she can provide to her clients to digitize their experience.

Johnson says she does also work with the online travel agencies' affiliate programs, but she prefers not to book clients through those sites.

“When you go to a hotel and you book through a site like that, they know your loyalty is only to price, so they may give you the room by the laundry room. **If they need to walk someone, they will walk you.** They know you will only ever be looking for price, so they're not concerned about keeping your loyalty,” she says.

But in cases where one of these sites offers the best deal, Johnson says she encourages clients to let her handle the booking since there is no additional cost to them and it comes with something that is priceless – peace of mind from knowing Johnson has sales representatives at the OTAs that can assist her if something goes wrong for one of her clients.

“I always say a cheap vacation can still be a very expensive mistake.”

- Behind-the-scenes

Powering the search and booking engines of the dozens of suppliers that Johnson and other agents use are the global distribution systems.

And as consumer-facing sites have matured to provide deep access to travel products and prices, agents rely on **these agent-exclusive products combined with their industry expertise to help them differentiate their services.**

“We are highly acclaimed for having over 260 airlines that have branded fares and ancillaries in our Travelport Smartpoint, where this content can be consumed through our APIs,” says Erika Moore, vice president and general manager of U.S. sales for Travelport.

Sabre Travel Network's leisure segment marketing manager, , says it has three areas of focus for its agent-facing technology: automation of repetitive and tedious tasks, integration of IATA's New Distribution Capability content standards and facilitation of business intelligence and data analytics.

All of these capabilities are available to agents through the new Sabre Red Workspace, the company's point-of-sale tool for travel agencies that has been rolling out since April.

Consider these facts when securing Travel Insurance - especially "free" credit card ones!



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- Do you know what the activation requirement is? Is it verified via a Policy Number or not?
- How much of the trip must you pay for on the card to be covered by the policy?
- (If you book a side tour while you're away will you be covered?)
- Are Existing Medical Conditions for both you + family members not travelling covered?
- Do you know what excess is applied?
- (some-times it is more than the quoted premium i.e. if you don't pay up front you pay later)
- Does your card cover you for rental car excess?
- Does it cover you for lost/stolen money?
- Does it apply the excess against claims for money?
- Do you have a copy of the policy wording?
- Are your travelling companions or family members covered or only the primary cardholder?
- Do you have a policy number to provide hospitals or other parties in an emergency?
- Is there an age limit on the policy?
- Do you have a 24 hour emergency assistance number to call in an emergency? (Are they based in Australia?)
- What is the maximum length of time you will be covered for?
- Travel agents can assist with submitting a claim and work with the insurers to make the process easier?
- Who will assist you with the claim before it is lodged, during the process and if need be to assist?
- Some Agents levy nominal fees when they issue your Insurance Policy but (rightfully so) will levy higher costs to assist in providing old ticket, voucher, Itinerary copies and advice that you must prepay in order to place a claim. You must consider these costs and determine if the Insurer underwriter will cover such costs as well as what you are claiming for . Such documentation and verification Voucher costs can exceed \$500 per person.

Usual Credit Card concerns that you must know answers for

- What is the activation requirement of your credit card insurance?
- From which date are you covered – payment date or departure date?
- How do you qualify for your free policy? Do all travel component costs or only portion need to be placed against card ? What Merchant Fees must be prepaid (added) to allow a Card to be used ?
- What happens if you pay in cash for additional travel whilst abroad - are these activities then covered?
- What happens if you change dates on your itinerary? Can you amend or extend?
- Who is the emergency assistance provider? Where are they located? What is their pre-approval amount on emergency medical?
- Are pre-existing medical conditions covered?
- What are the restrictions around luggage cover? Are you covered for lost items?
- Who is actually covered on the policy, and to what amounts?
- What about protection for non-travelling relatives?
- What are the limitations around car hire?
- What is the excess on the policy? Does this apply per claim or per event?
- Do age restrictions apply? What about natural disasters? What about strikes?

Will your travel insurance provide cover if:

- You require 24 hour emergency assistance. (Do you know the phone number to call?)
- You need the insurer to guarantee your hospital bills.
- You are injured as a result of a terrorist act.
- You have an existing medical condition.
- Your rental car is damaged and you need to pay the car rental company an excess.
- Your laptop is stolen. Your wallet is stolen from your pocket and you lose \$200.
- You are going to be away for more than 3 months.
- You are travelling domestically.
- You are over 60 years of age.
- You decide to participate in activities such as white water rafting, bungee jumping or parasailing.
- You are on a working holiday.

Can you rely on credit card travel insurance?

Travel Insider

Many travellers rely solely on the insurance that comes with their gold or platinum credit card, but others prefer a stand-alone policy.

Everybody loves a freebie, especially if it's at the expense of a bank making huge profits. But is free travel insurance something we can trust? Many travellers rely solely on the insurance that comes with their gold or platinum credit card, but others prefer a stand-alone policy.

The problem with any insurance policy is that the only way to test it is to make a claim and then it is too late. If you fall outside the fine print of a travel insurance policy and the insurer refuses to pay up, it can quickly become a desperate situation.

An independent insurance expert, Allan Manning, says these warnings should be heeded. Manning, the managing director of an insurance comparison and risk management says the free travel insurance that comes with credit cards is “very basic” cover, at best.

“I've got credit cards like most people, but I always buy my own insurance,” he says.

“It's a very important purchase. It can cost you everything if you get it wrong.”

Manning says credit card travel insurance is a “Claytons cover” – the insurance you have when you're not having insurance. **He says travellers should rely on this insurance only “if it's not going to happen”.**

One of the biggest problems is that credit card travel insurance does not usually allow for pre-existing medical conditions to be taken into account. “If you've had a heart attack in the past or you've got high blood pressure, they're always looking for a reason not to pay,” he says.

Credit card policies often have limited maximum trip duration, provide restricted cancellation cover, no protection in the event of kidnap or political evacuation and little or no death cover.

Manning believes travel insurance can be divided into 3 levels: credit card, retail & corporate travel policies. Those with corporate cover have the best protection, while retail policies are better than free credit card insurance.

“If you see ads on television, they suggest that insurance is simple, that it's all the same and it's just about the price. But there's a massive difference between policies,” says Manning.

Manning says coverage is only half the story. You need to be able to claim if something goes wrong. “Some [providers] look for any excuse not to pay and some are very good,” he says.

Manning says claims experience is vital in medical situations. “If you're overseas and trying to deal with someone in Mumbai who can't understand you, it can be very difficult,”

If you stick with the travel insurance provided through your credit card, the most important thing to check is the conditions about activating the cover.

Some cards require you to pay for **all of your trip through the card** – which is easier said than done as many airlines and travel companies discourage credit card payments and levy Merchant Fees anyway – while some require only the bulk of your trip or your airfare to be paid through the card.

Take time to check the wording, particularly on exclusions, and see how the coverage compares to a stand-alone policy. If you're a frequent traveller, it might be worth considering an annual stand-alone insurance policy, which you can get for less than \$300 a year.

Just remember that cheapest is not necessarily best when it comes to insurance.

See your Travel Agent who will not only give you advise and issue the best Policy but also be there when the needs arise and assist you with re arranging travel arrangements and working alongside the Insurance provider . Saving a few dollars is false economy when your Travel arrangements or life is at stake!

Comparing the special Axis Travel Centre QBE POLICY that we issue against similar QBE policies available online or other Insurance policies.

THERE ARE LARGE and CRITICAL DIFFERENCES.

Eff Sept 2018.

Benefit	Other or online Policy	AXIS issued Policy
Cancellation or holiday deferment costs	\$ 60,000	unlimited
Emergency travel arrangements and accommodation expenses	\$ 60,000	unlimited
Agents cancellation fees	\$ 1,500	\$ 2,000
Loss of reward points	\$ 60,000	unlimited
Medical and dental expenses	unlimited	unlimited
Hospital compensation	\$ 5,000	\$ 8,000
Critical illness or injury - emergency travel expenses for relative	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000
Post-hospital accommodation	\$ 500	\$ 500
Dental Expenses due to sudden and acute pain	\$ 500	\$ 1,000
Evacuation and repatriation	unlimited	unlimited
Non medical evacuation and repatriation	unlimited	unlimited
Travel delay	\$ 1,500	\$ 2,000
Airfare compensation	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Missed connection - special events	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,500
Resumption of trip	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Withdrawal of services	\$ 500	\$ 500
Hijacking	\$ 20,000	unlimited
Emergency accommodation due to terrorism	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Home and contents insurance excess	\$ 200	\$ 500
rental vehicle insurance excess	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
return of rental vehicle	\$ 750	\$ 750
Luggage and personal effects maximum limit	\$ 7,500	\$ 12,000
Personal Computer	\$ 3,000	\$ 6,000

Camera and video limit	\$ 3,000	\$ 4,000
Watches and Jewellery limit	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Dentures or dental prosthesis limit	\$ 800	\$ 800
Other individual item limit	\$ 600	\$ 700
Emergency luggage	\$ 250	\$ 500
Stolen cash	\$ 200	\$ 250
Replacement golf and surf equipment	\$ 200	\$ 200
Replacement passports and travel documents	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Fraudulent use of credit cards	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Accidental Death	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
Funeral expenses overseas or repatriation of remains	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
Funeral expenses within Australia	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
Total permanent disability	\$ 12,500	\$ 12,500
Loss of income	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000
Personal liability	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 3,000,000
Legal expenses	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000
Financial default of travel service providers	nil	\$ 10,000
Wholesalers	nil	\$ 5,000
Ski lift passes	\$ 300	\$ 300
ski run closure	\$ 500	\$ 500
Hire replacement snow equipment	\$ 300	\$ 300
Cruise catch up	nil	\$ 2,000
Cabin or ships hospital confinement	nil	\$ 500
Pre-pad shore excursion cancellation	nil	\$ 1,000
Delayed cruise return	nil	\$ 2,000

Court jails persistent online review fraudster

September 13, 2018

An Italian court has jailed a persistent online review fraudster in a ruling hailed by TripAdvisor as a landmark result in one of the first legal cases of its kind.

The Criminal Court of Lecce in southern Italy ruled that writing fake reviews using a false identity constitutes criminal conduct under Italian law.

The owner of an enterprise called PromoSalento, **which sold fake review packages to hospitality businesses in Italy**, was sentenced to nine months in prison and ordered to pay about EUR 8000 (AUD 13,000) in costs and damages.

Paid review fraud – when companies or individuals “sell” fake reviews to business owners – is a violation of the law in many jurisdictions, but this is one of the first cases of enforcement resulting in a criminal conviction,

TripAdvisor vice president and associate general counsel, Brad Young, said: “We see this as a landmark ruling for the Internet. Writing fake reviews has always been fraud, but this is the first time we’ve seen someone sent to jail as a result.

“We invest a lot in fraud prevention and we’re successful at tackling it – since 2015, we’ve put a stop to the activity of more than 60 different paid review companies worldwide. However, we can only do so much alone, which is why we’re eager to collaborate with regulators and law enforcement authorities to support their prosecutions.”

The chairman of UNWTO’s World Committee on Tourism Ethics, Pascal Lamy, commented: “Online reviews play a major role in tourism and consumer purchasing decisions, but it’s important everyone plays by the rules.

Credit Card Insurance?

Q CAN I rely on the free travel insurance given by my credit card provider? I have been told that there will be no policy document issued and the only document I have to prove cover is the credit card statement that shows I did use my credit card to pay for part of the travel expenses.

A There are many credit card options available, and some do include travel insurance but you will need to read through the product disclosure statement carefully before you decide whether it's for you. I'm an advocate of buying a travel insurance policy issued by a travel insurance provider. I have heard many horror stories of people having inadequate medical cover and getting caught overseas with giant medical bills and, even worse, being turned away from some American hospitals. The benefit of a travel insurance policy is you will be provided with an emergency assistance phone number direct to Australia. If something goes wrong, you can speak to an Australian – usually in the medical field – who will assess the situation and communicate with the local doctors, your own doctors here at home and, if needed, arrange for emergency evacuation. The other important thing is you will have proof of your policy to show a hospital you are completely covered and they can admit you.

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MEDIA ARTICLE: Sep 2017 : Travel insurance on credit card? Check terror cover

Free travel insurance, offered by banks and financial institutions as part of the perks for premium customers who hold platinum, gold or black credit cards, may be useless if travellers are caught up in a terrorist incident.

An investigation and report by the Australian newspaper says that hundreds of thousands of Australians are heading off on their holidays under the impression they are covered by free travel insurance through premium credit cards. They are unaware that if they are hit by an act of terror, they may have no coverage at all.

The Australian found that nearly 70% of the cards offer zero terrorism cover. Nearly 80% offer no hospital and evacuation cover. Travellers holding the cards could face medical and evacuation costs totalling hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars if the worst happened, the report said.

The paper found that while most regular travel insurance policies provided hospital and evacuation cover for victims of an attack, credit card coverage was not so generous.

The situation, and the Australian's exposure of it, has shocked politicians and cardholders, apparently prompting some of the banks to do a re-think. Westpac is reportedly moving to include some terrorism cover for its premium credit card customers.

*The Australian's investigation covered almost 100 credit cards offered by 18 of Australia's most prominent banks and financial institutions. It found that 12 of the insurance schemes associated with the cards **offered no coverage** for terrorist attacks, cards offered by Westpac, Citibank, Suncorp, Bank of Queensland, St George Bank, Bank SA, Bank of Melbourne, Bendigo Bank, HSBC, Bankwest, Virgin Money and Heritage Bank.*

With two other institutions, American Express and Macquarie, the high-end cards offered no terrorism cover other than limited compensation for injuries from terror-related transport accidents, the paper reported.

*On the positive side, the Australian's probe found that the premium cards of four institutions – ING, NAB, CBA and ANZ – offered significant hospital cover in the event of a terrorist attack, **though they didn't necessarily cover associated costs such as travel delays and flight cancellations.***

AXIS TRAVEL RESPONSE :

Axis Travel Centre checked the most popular policies in our Industry. Axis Travel clients who have us issue the exclusive QBE endorsed branded Policy are protected , which also protects collapse of Supplier/Airline etc, NIL excess payable.

Add this to the Axis Travel exclusive , free, **UMBRELLA SECURITY** Insurance protection we give our clients and you are protected way beyond any online or industry Airline/Cruise/Supplier or any other Travel Agency.

It is far too late to ponder "what if" or "I should have...." After the event. Minimize exposure and risks. Heed our advice.

Book travel with Axis Travel Centre and receive our free **UMBRELLA SECURITY** Insurance then consider our QBE travel Insurance for your personal/medical/emergency etc coverage.

PROVIDER	Terrorism	Hijacking
SureSave	No Cover	Yes
QBE	YES to comprehensive levels of cover only. Basic or inbound policies are NOT eligible. With those eligible, a maximum of A\$3000 applies and the daily limit is \$300	Yes
CoverMore	No Cover	YES to International Plans only. Maximum thresholds apply to respective levels of cover with daily limits. TBA at the time of insurance take-out
AUSSIE	No Cover	Yes

The dark side of online travel booking: Fed up small businesses call for ACCC action

MATTHEW ELMAS / Tuesday, September 11, 2018

The ACCC has confirmed it is investigating whether to take action to address issues within the online travel booking industry, amid persistent concerns that independent hotel and motel operators are being ripped off by online travel agents (OTAs).

Online travel booking agents (OTAs), such as **booking.com and Expedia**, have exploded in popularity in recent years, but members of the industry say the proliferation of the services is having an unprecedented impact on small businesses in the sector.

It comes as calls to address conduct in the industry mount, with outspoken entrepreneur Dick Smith last week slamming OTAs for “extorting money” out of local businesses.

Operators report signing contracts with so-called ‘pay parity’ clauses that prevent them from advertising cheaper rates on their websites than those listed by OTAs.

Another, who asked not to be named for fear of retribution, says they were threatened with being thrown off one online booking site for violating a pay parity clause.

“They said they would kick us off the platform,” the business owner says. “It feels like some kind of extortion.”

A spokesman for long term established Axis Travel Centre in South Australia, commented that **“Travel Agents have access to all rates advertised in all cases , as we also have computers but also many times we can offer better rates, in different or same room categories with other value added items, with the added benefit of giving clients a human contact point and not risking their credit card and other personal data in being placed online”**

When asked about the current intense advertising being invested by the OTA companies **“An important facet of the advertising being made by the OTA’s is that millions of dollars are being spent by them that is extracted, or should I say stolen, from the marketing dollars that Hotels pay them that absolutely no Travel Agency can match on such a mammoth level of spend, nor should we. Quality travel agents spend those monies investing in consistent staff training, updating our expertise and annual investments in professional standards that OTA websites and Toll free numbers need not adhere to. Overall the message to travelers is that they should understand that OTA marketing does not equate to the best deal at all, it is just their ruthless ability to convince consumers that they are getting the best deal, when they truly are not”**

“We’d go out of business”

These operators feel as though they’re being “ripped off” by the platforms but say that they’ve got little choice but to sign-up due to the popularity of OTAs with consumers.

“We’d go out of business if we weren’t on these sites,” says one motel owner, who derives 80% of their business from OTAs.

“I don’t know a single property that’s not listed.”

Others said ditching the platforms isn’t an option because search-engine listings prioritise larger platforms over the websites of independent players.

The small business owners *SmartCompany* spoke to are not alone. A recent survey of 6,500 independent accommodation providers carried out by the Australian Accommodation Association found OTAs are playing on the minds of many operators.

“This is the number one issue in our industry,” Richard Munro, chief executive of the association, told *SmartCompany*.

Munro says businesses are facing losing 30-60% of their business overnight if they were to be kicked off online booking platforms, forcing them into a position of compliance.

“We want operators that have made long term investments to have the right to be able to put prices to consumers that don’t have to be equal or above what the OTAs have,” he says.

Better rankings

Compounding concerns, emails sent to an owner by Expedia and seen by *SmartCompany* show operators are also competing for search rankings within the platforms themselves.

A listing assessment sent to one owner notifying them of a “very poor” listing warned their access to features could be affected

The email said the offer was intended to “assist” the owner with “assessing the competitiveness” of their property if they “wished to do so”.

Expedia Group did not respond to requests for comment when contacted by *SmartCompany*, but booking.com spokesperson Jaime de Silva says search rankings aren’t determined by rates on its platform.

However, booking.com does have a preferred partner program that it uses to provide a selected group of partners with more prominent listings on its website.

“It’s a choice”

De Silva said booking.com processes 1.5 million bookings globally every day, which makes the platform a valuable “marketing tool” for small businesses.

“It’s a choice. If they feel that booking.com doesn’t bring them a big return ... then they’re free to take their marketing dollars elsewhere,” she says.

OTA “duopoly” But many small accommodation providers believe the size of the big OTA companies makes them impossible to ignore.

Expedia Group — which owns namesake Expedia, Hotels.com, Trivago, Wotif and Stayz.com.au— says it operates more than 200 travel booking sites across 75 countries, posting \$US10.7 billion (\$15 billion) in revenue for the year ended 30 June. The company acquired Australian-founded Wotif.com for \$703 million in 2014.

Booking Holdings — which owns Booking.com, Priceline.com Kayak and Agoda— says it operates in more than 220 countries and generated more than US\$81 billion (\$113.9 billion) in gross bookings in 2017.

Together Booking.com and Expedia Group account for 53.1% of Australia’s \$1 billion online travel booking market, which has grown at an annual rate of 16% over the last five years, according to IBISWorld.

Push for ACCC action The combined market power of the companies is raising eyebrows with local regulators and small business advocates.

Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman Kate Carnell says **she’s had multiple complaints from small businesses about the conduct of OTAs.**

“This is a huge issue ... [operators] can’t afford not to deal with them, but they can’t advertise their own rooms separately for anything less,” she told *SmartCompany*.

Carnell believes the size of the OTA giants may merit the creation of a legislated code of conduct, similar to the way in which the ACCC regulates large operators in the grocery space, including supermarkets Coles and Woolworths.

“A clause that stops a business being able to market its own rooms at a lower price than on their own platform is restrictive trade and that’s not okay,” she says.

Small business owners *SmartCompany* spoke to also called for renewed action, with one saying that they felt as though the ACCC had dropped the ball in 2016. “The government needs to push the ACCC to act,” they said.

Overseas, regulators in Europe and the UK are already taking actions to safeguard businesses and consumers against the conduct of OTAs.

The UK’s competition and markets authority (CMA) launched enforcement action against hotel booking sites earlier this year, saying that it had “widespread concerns” about the conduct of online platforms. Meanwhile, regulators in Italy, France and Germany have outlawed parity rates.

In a statement provided to *SmartCompany*, the ACCC said it is assessing whether further action within the online travel booking industry is warranted.

“The ACCC continues to look into potential issues within the online travel booking industry, including parity clauses, to see if further action is warranted to improve competition and business practice,” a spokesperson said.

The problem with online reviews and ratings

User ratings and product quality

Consumers use online user ratings because they assume these provide a good indication of product or service quality. For example, you would expect a laptop with an average rating of four out of five stars to be objectively better than a laptop with an average rating of three out of five stars, 100% of the time.

In order to test this assumption, one [researcher team](#) put together an impressive dataset comprising of 344,157 Amazon.com ratings for 1,272 products, in 120 product categories. For each product, they obtained objective quality scores from the website [Consumer Reports](#). They also collected data on prices, brand image measures, and two independent sources of resale values in the market for second hand or used goods.

The researchers found that average user ratings correlated poorly with the scores from Consumer Reports. For example, when the difference in average user rating between pairs of products was larger than one star, the item with the higher user rating was rated more favourably by Consumer Reports only about two-thirds of the time. In other words, if you were comparing a laptop with an average rating of four out of five stars, with another laptop with an average rating of three out of five stars, the first laptop would only be objectively better 65% (not 100%) of the time. This is a far cry from a sure difference in quality. Moreover, the average user ratings did not predict resale value in the used-product marketplace.

The reasons online ratings don't reflect the real thing

There are several reasons why average user ratings may not predict objective quality measures. User reviews may include a broader range of criteria than those Consumer Reports does, such as subjective aspects of the use experience (like aesthetics, popularity, emotional benefits).

Many reviews are also based on small samples. As any statistics teacher will tell you, all things being equal, the average user rating should be more informative as sample size increases relative to variability. Indeed, in the [online rating study](#), the correlation between average user rating and Consumer Reports scores was higher when the sample size was large. Unfortunately, average user ratings are often based on [small samples and high variability](#).

Online reviews are based on a biased subset of those who actually purchased the product. In general, reviews are left by those that “brag” or “moan” about their product experience, often resulting in a [two mode distribution of ratings](#).

This is where the average does not give a good indication of the true population average. For example, in one comprehensive dataset for a large private label retailer, the percentage of buyers who left a review was just [1.5%](#). This means that 98.5% of the people eligible to leave a review chose not to do so.

Many groups also now actively seek to manipulate average ratings. This can be done in the form of fake reviews. For [example](#), businesses (or their agents) may post fictitious favourable reviews for their own products and/or post fictitious negative reviews for the products of their competitors. [According to one study](#), roughly 16% of restaurant reviews on the website Yelp were suspicious or fake.

Websites like Yelp.com and Amazon.com try to mitigate such ingenuity. For example, one of the [Ivanka Trump collection's shoes](#) has an average rating of four and a half out of five stars despite hundreds of (presumably fake) one-star reviews.

What you can actually tell from online reviews

There is a way to use the information from reviews and ratings despite all of these potential pitfalls. First, look for products with a high average user rating, many reviews, and not a lot of variance in the rating scores. Beware placing too much faith in average ratings that are based on few reviews and with high variance in the ratings. You can also consider online reviews in light of additional sources that provide objective product evaluations, from technical experts. Sources of this kind of information include Consumer Reports, Choice, Consumers Union, Which? and CNET.

Where possible, you can consider employing technology designed to help you navigate the bias in online reviews. Examples include [Fakespot](#) and [ReviewMeta](#). For example, ReviewMeta scans all reviews from a product's online listing page, and then provides an adjusted average rating. This adjusted rating accounts for all sorts of suspicious activities such as a high proportion of reviews from users with unverified purchases.

So, the next time you're evaluating products online, feel free to start with the average user rating, but be wary of making your final judgement based only on this cue.

CBS star slams TripAdvisor

TRIPADVISOR started out as a great idea, as a platform where travellers simply exchanged their experiences, but has "morphed into just another aggressive booking engine," according to Peter Greenberg, respected travel editor of US TV network CBS.

Greenberg was one of the keynote speakers at the Collette Global Forum in Rhode Island today, and related a number of stories about TripAdvisor including its now discontinued policy of deleting negative reviews relating to assaults, including a case where a guest was raped by a security guard.

He also noted a recent stay at a substandard property in New York where guests were encouraged by TripAdvisor to give a positive review in return for a discount.

"The hotel was incentivising me to lie - with the full complicity of TripAdvisor," he said.

TripAdvisor rejects claims that 'one in three reviews is fake'



TripAdvisor has hit out at an investigation that claims up to a third of reviews on its site are fake and that hotels and restaurants are buying positive reviews.

Analysis **of tens of thousands of reviews** on the site has shown that top-rated bed and breakfasts have almost twice as many 'false' reviews as lower ranked establishments and websites are offering glowing reviews for £38, according to The Times. Others allowed owners to bulk-buy reviews for less money, with one offering 10 positive reviews for £69.

One restaurant owner admitted to the paper he had already posted 'a large number of positive reviews' but wanted further help to boost his ranking and asked a website offering fake reviews that had been set up by the Times to help improve his standing.

Analysis of the reviews was done by Fakespot.com, which uses an algorithm and machine to identify suspicious reviews.

Saoud Khalifah, Fakespot's founder, told The Times: "TripAdvisor has a huge set of problems.

"From our database, the mean of fake reviews is 32.9 per cent. For B&Bs, that rises to 41.9 per cent.

There are a large number of accounts with one or two reviews created by people within hotels or restaurants that have posted fake reviews.