

# Online Booking Engine

@ 2015

*An innovative technological solution to help Travel Agencies*

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## Online Booking Engine

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- Agents must have an online presence
- Use and analyse your customer data
- Have a user friendly website
- Prioritize development items wish list
- Surround yourself with experts
- Embrace Social Media
- Don't fight technology

*Kay Dixon, 2014*

**What is Online Booking Engine?** – Also referred to as an **internet booking engine** (IBE) is an application which helps the travel and tourism industry support reservation through the Internet. Although the technology is relatively new, it helps consumers to book flights, hotels, all-inclusive vacation packages, insurance and other services online. This is a much needed application for the aviation industry as it has become one of the fastest growing sales channels.

IBEs were necessary as the underlying (often called legacy/ blue page) systems were unable to cater economically for the large number of shopping transactions and the speed of development required by the customers. In most cases the underlying systems were not designed for direct exposure to consumers.

**What is a Travel Website?** – Travel website is a website on the World Wide Web that is dedicated to travel. The site may be focused on travel reviews, trip fares, or a combination of both.

**How does IBE works?** An IBE is integrated on the home page of a travel website to enable easy access for customers. When users enter their travel preferences, the IBE contacts the GDS or CRS/HRS to receive the relevant information which is then shown to the user in an appropriate formatted interface.

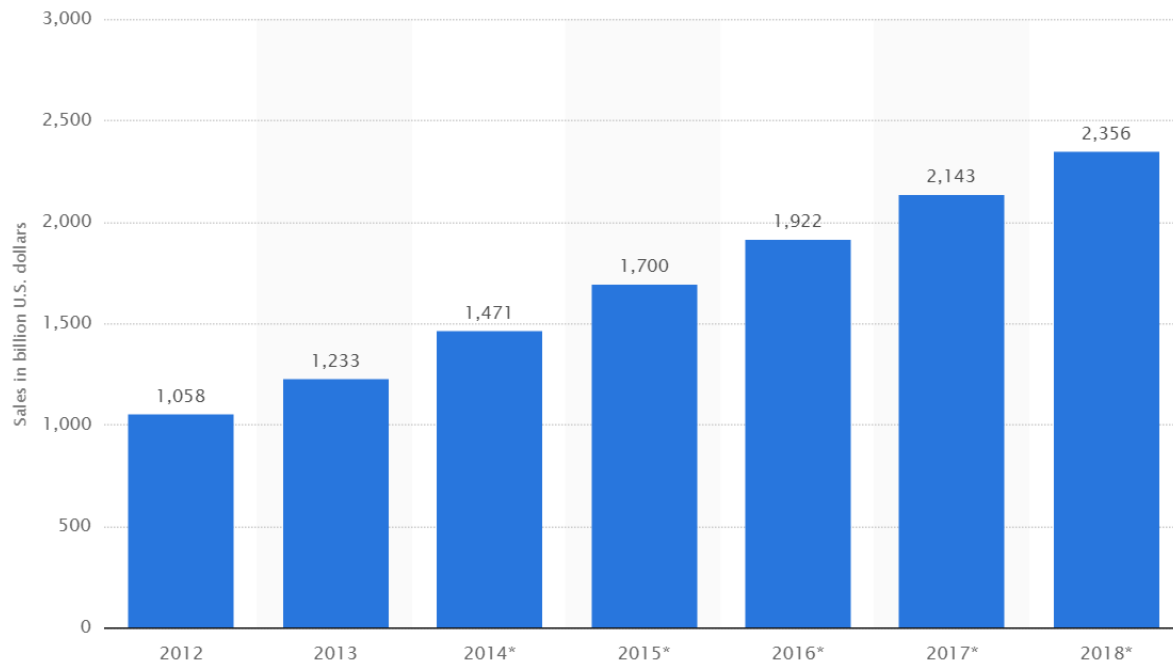
After the customer has finished selecting their flights they must choose a payment method. There are several options to choose from; Book on hold, direct transfers from a customer's bank account and online payment, the number of options mostly depend on the Point of Sale (Country). A Passenger Name Record (PNR) is created in the GDS and airline's reservation systems, once the customer has completed the payment process, an E-ticket will be issued.

### **Why selling online?**

Online business also known as Ecommerce is big marketplace. Figure 1.1 shows the infographic which looks at the sales volume associated with online shopping. They provide information on e-commerce sales worldwide in 2012 and 2013 including a forecast until 2018. In 2016, global B2C e-commerce sales are expected to reach 1.92 trillion U.S. dollars. Therefore, all business must have online presence to share in the national cake (Invesp 2014).

The Internet is here to stay, and many agencies have made their first leap to the Internet with a travel web site, and many are now moving forwards, not only as an advertising and promotion platform, but as an active business platform.

The great thing about the Internet is that it can be used as the great equalizer for small and mid-sized travel agents. The smallest sub-agents today can have as great web presence as the largest 5 OTAs through their web site.



**Why Consumer prefer Shopping Online?** – Most consumers shop online, and the majority of those shopper prefer shopping online for reasons like saving time, conformability and access to varieties.

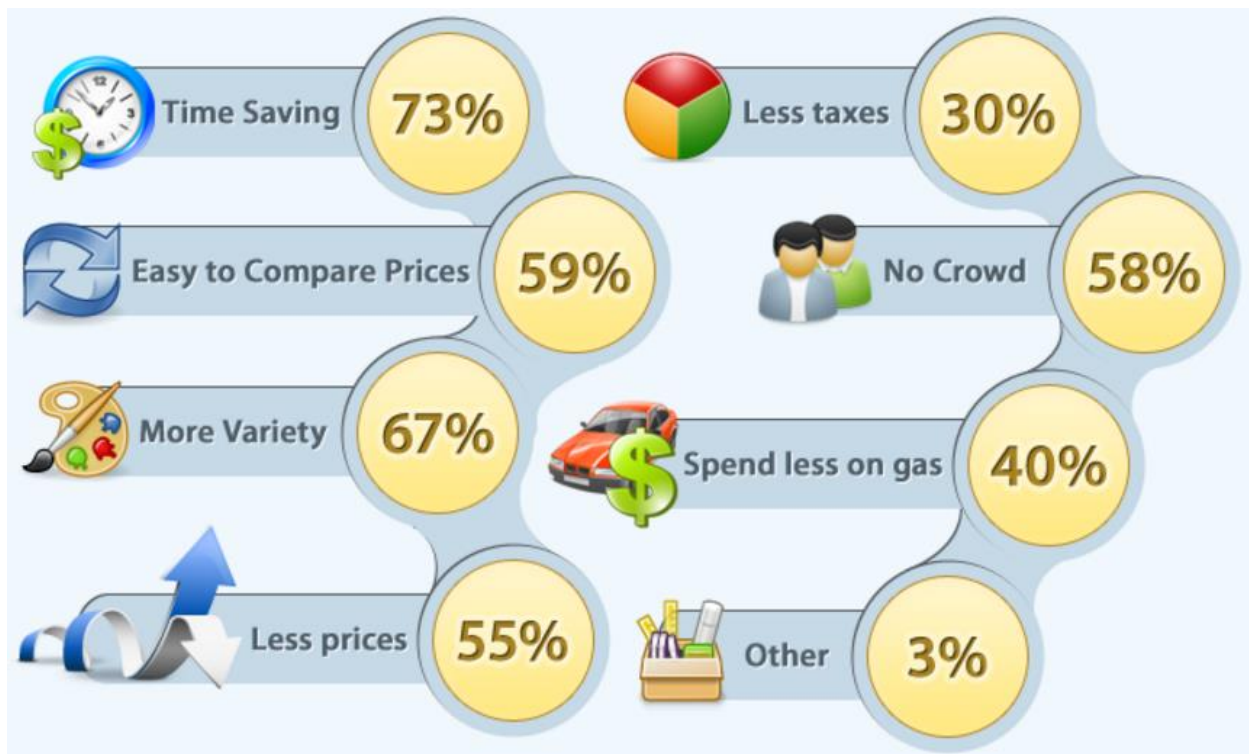


Figure 1.3: statistics of why *consumers shop online* (Invesp 2014).

## Advantages and Disadvantages of online booking engine

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### Advantages of IBE

You may have asked yourself why so many agencies are so interested in getting an online booking engine on their web site. Below are the reasons why!

- Less Staff needed
- No physical Space – no bills, no rent of office
- Attracts more Customers as internet is used by many people
- Affordable
- Provides you with new revenue opportunities
- Includes popular features generally offered by larger online travel sites
- Enables travel to be booked anytime, Open 24/7 to receive reservations
- Commission Free
- It's simply good customer service
- Minimize your workload
- All your customer data in a structured system
- Up selling
- Discount Codes
- Clear and Simple Overview
- Online payments

There are of course even more advantages, but the above list should at least help you to convince travel agencies on whether they should have an online booking engine or not.

### Disadvantages of IBE

1. You need Internet access.
2. Less personal touch – harder to sell
3. Initial Cost – Hardware, setting/maintaining webpage
4. You need to be ready for an influx of new customers.
5. Not all online booking systems are created equal.
6. Booking systems that don't bring you new quality customers.

## Online Travel Agency (OTA)

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Online agencies operate almost exclusively through their web sites. These agencies concentrate on selling travel commodities such as air, hotel and car rentals. They do also sell experiential products such as cruises and tours. A travel agent who works for the online travel agency can support their products thru phone or online chat. Some of the popular OTAs are Travelocity, Ajala.ng, Jaratrips, Wakanow, Wisefares and, Expedia.

### OTA Structure Model

From the research, it was discovered that most of the decerning and ambitious OTAs in Nigeria failed not because they do not have required resources, but due to wrong or No structure. As a Sabre account manager, it is our responsibility to help/support our customers that need helpin this area. Figure 1.4 shows basic OTA structure and the job discriptions in respectives arm are as follows:

#### OBE Administrator

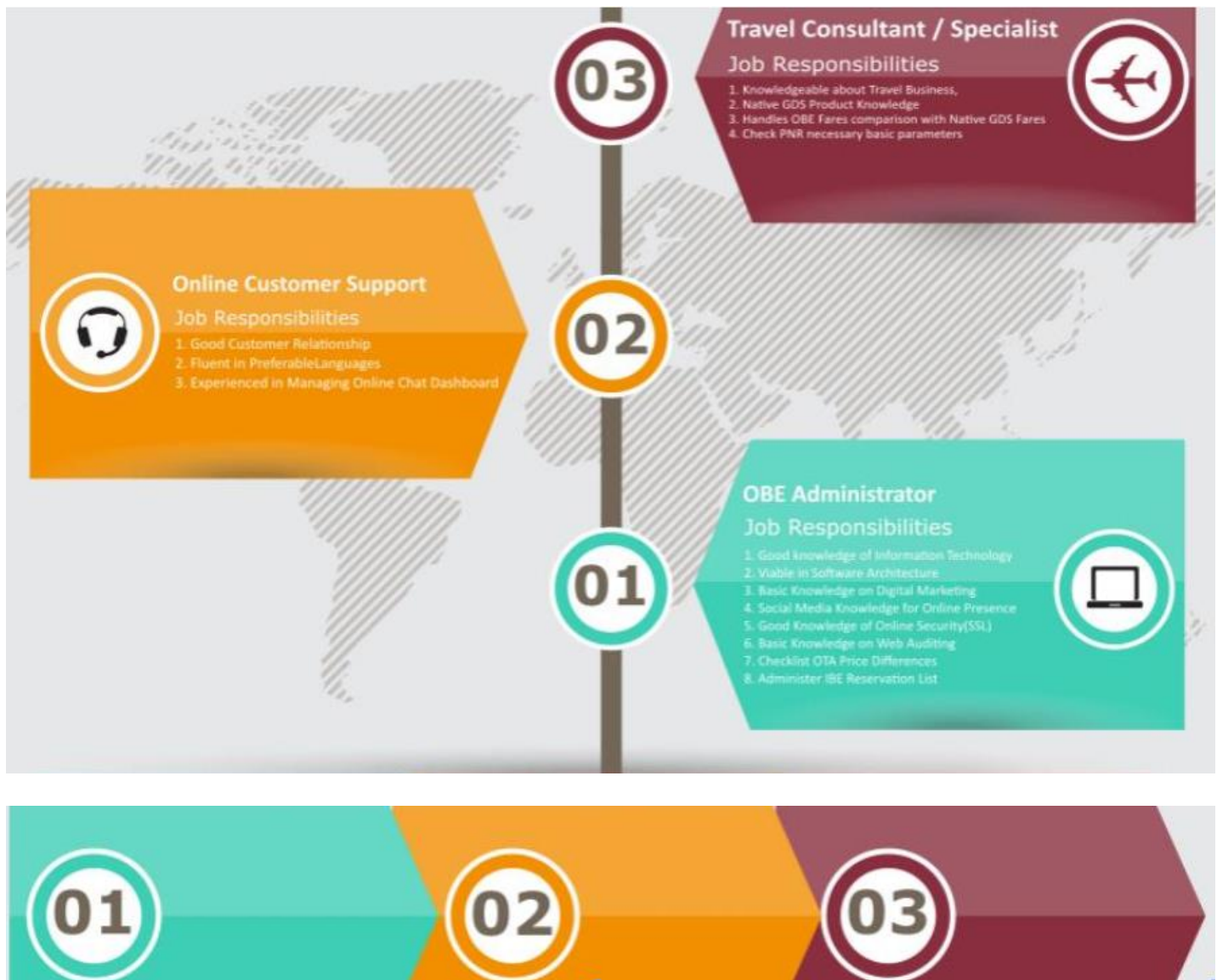
- Good knowledge of Information Technology
- Viable in Software Architecture, Basic Knowledge on Digital Marketing
- Social Media Knowledge for Online Presence
- Good Knowledge of Online Security(SSL)
- Basic Knowledge on Web Auditing
- Checklist for OTA Price Differences
- Administer the IBE Reservation List

#### Online Customer Support

- Good Customer Relationship
- Fluent in Preferable Languages
- Experienced in Managing Online Chat Dashboard

#### Travel Consultant / Specialist

- Knowledgeable about Travel Business
- Native GDS Product Knowledge
- Handles OBE Fares comparison with GDS Fares
- Check PNR necessary basic parameters





## Issues of Online Travel Agencies in Nigeria.

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1. **Staying competitive:** The Nigerian online landscape is highly competitive with not only a large number of OTAs but also other players such as supplier websites, tour operators, consolidators and offline travel agencies. Meta-search companies (e.g. [wego.com](http://wego.com), [trawex.com](http://trawex.com) and [travelgrove.com](http://travelgrove.com)) have added to this competitiveness by making price comparison very easy. Price has become the only competitive weapon but tends to commoditize travel products.
2. **Ensuring customer loyalty:** As price is the main driver for purchasing travel online, the consumer is very accustomed to clicking between various websites to search for the best deals on their air tickets which is perceived as a commodity by end-consumers. On average a Nigerian consumer searches through 3.5 websites before making a booking (SabreWA online research, 2015). The only way for Online Travel Agencies to survive is to stop competing on price and to find other differentiating factors such as content, service, technology etc.
3. **Profitability:** This is one of the challenges facing most Nigeria mid-sized OTAs. No commission from the Airline, their margins are minimal or non-existent: this is due to high costs and low prices they are forced to offer in order to stay competitive and to the current product mix they offer. A lot of these Online Travel Agencies are no longer start-ups and are facing pressure from their investors and shareholders to turn around the situation.

## Sabre Web Booking Engine

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Sabre West Africa partnered with leading online technology company *ESS IT Solutions* to deploy a web booking engine with increased capabilities and enriched content so you can provide your customers with choices.

Customers can book directly and securely online, driving agency revenue and freeing up valuable time so that the agency can work more efficiently. The new *Sabre Web Booking Engine* by ESS offers more functionality than ever before as agency are able to:

- **Personalise the look and feel of the modern booking interface with your own branding**
- **Provide air, car and hotel shopping and booking within a single PNR**
- **Offer low cost carrier content with the ability to add unique regional content**
- **Provide lowest fare search using 'Bargain Finder Max' with handy calendar shopping**
- **Offer an advanced and secured range of regional payment gateways**
- **Easily adjust your agency fee and mark-up module**

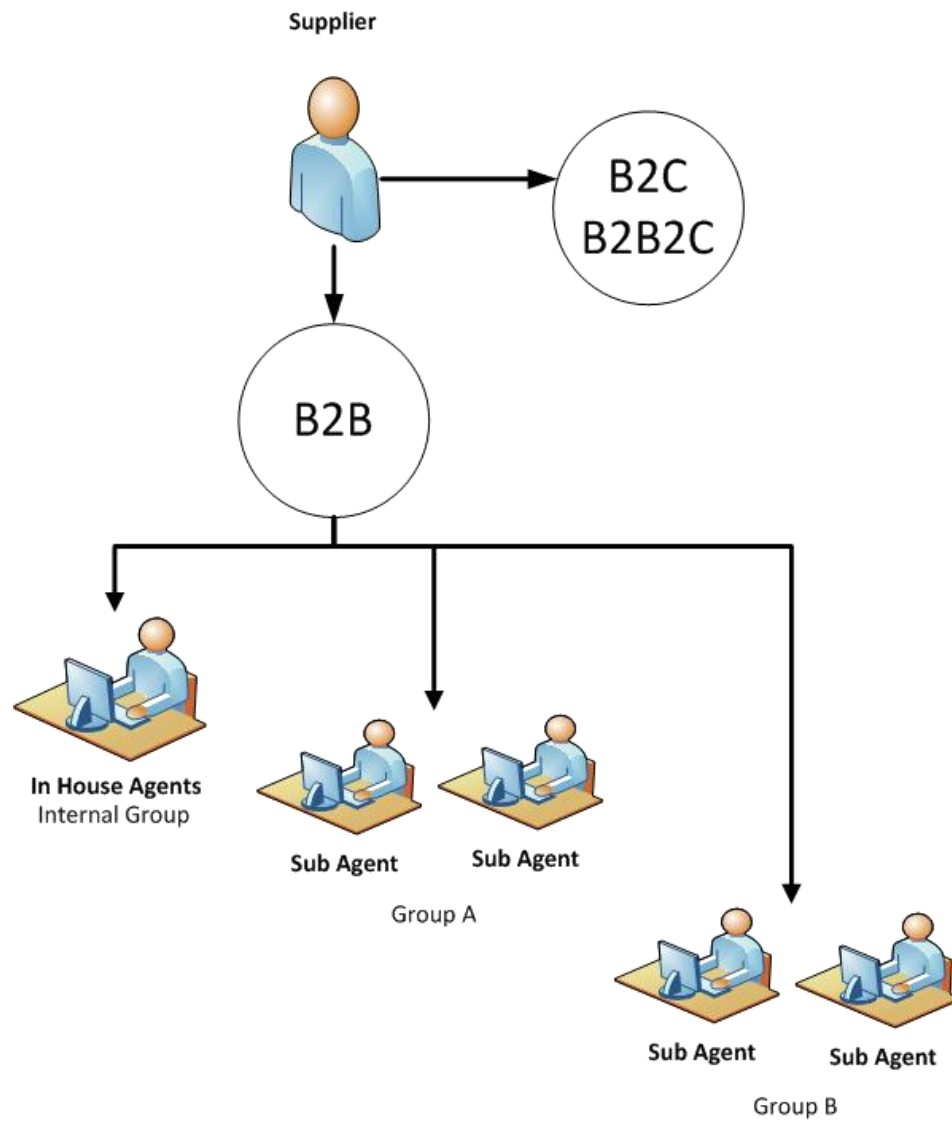
The *Sabre Web Booking Engine* is now available in your market. Contact SabreWA Online Team for more information and stay tuned for further updates.

## Features of the Internet Booking Engine

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Features of IBE are not limited to below:

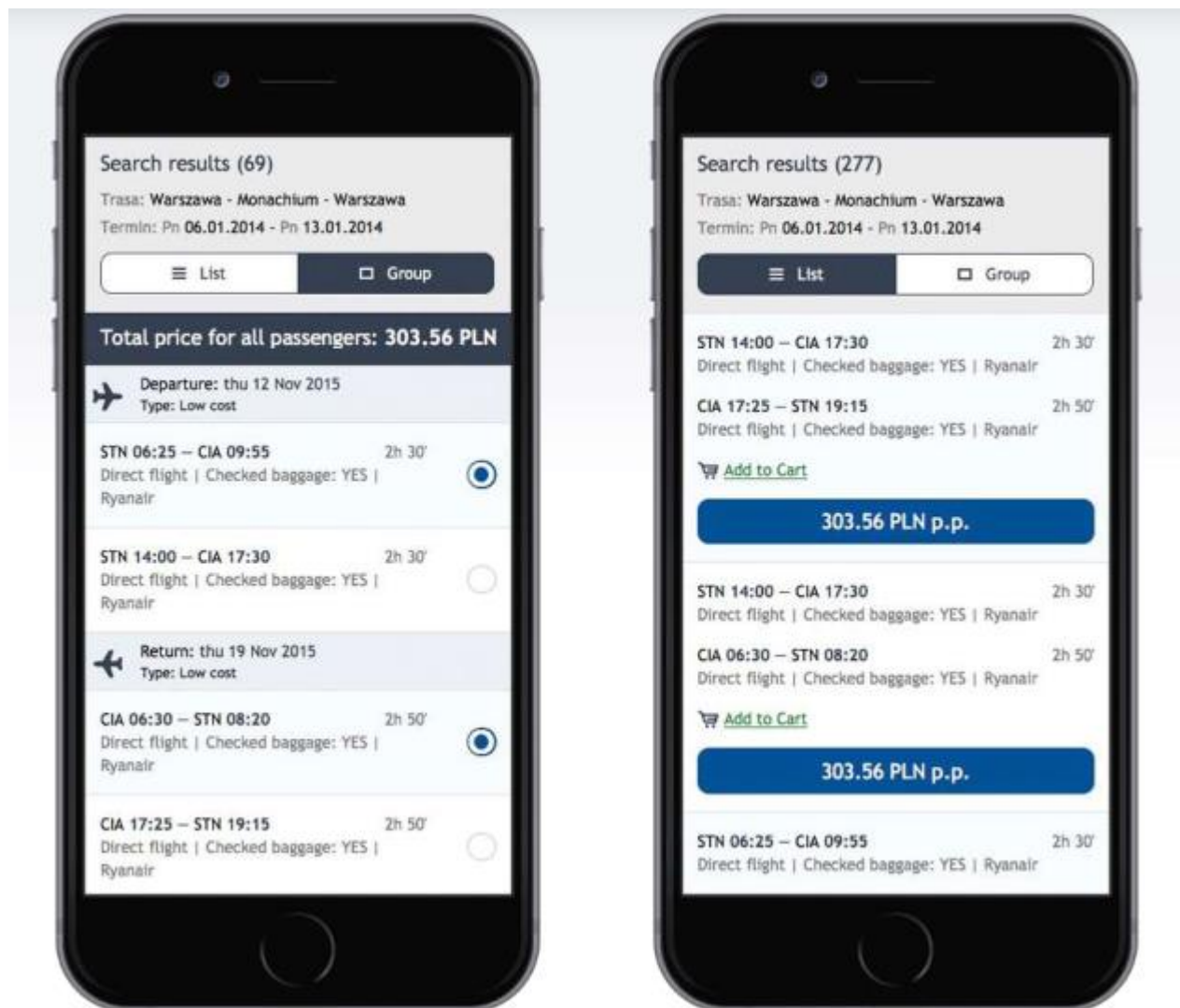
- B2C, B2B (F are Quote/Available), B2B2C Booking Engine
- Powerful Control Panel to access and manage your bookings & IBE
- Advanced granular mark-up module
- Advanced security monitoring and control
- Flex Search (+/-3 day, search by airline/cabin/stops)
- Up to 19/50/100/200 available fares in 15 seconds
- Combining content from multiple suppliers with parallel search
- Support for multiple currencies and languages
- Simple integration and fully customizable
- Supports **Insurance** and **Coupon Modules**.
- Supplier has complete Distribution Control:
  - By websites/users
  - Mark-up by groups
  - Manage Commission/Mark up by Airline
  - Manage Merchant fees
  - Corporate Codes
- Full control over mark-ups/markdowns
- Support for Credit Limits
- Full Content management system
- Photos tailored to the type of phone
- The customer holds an offer literally in the palm
- Live room
- More flexible in rule set-up

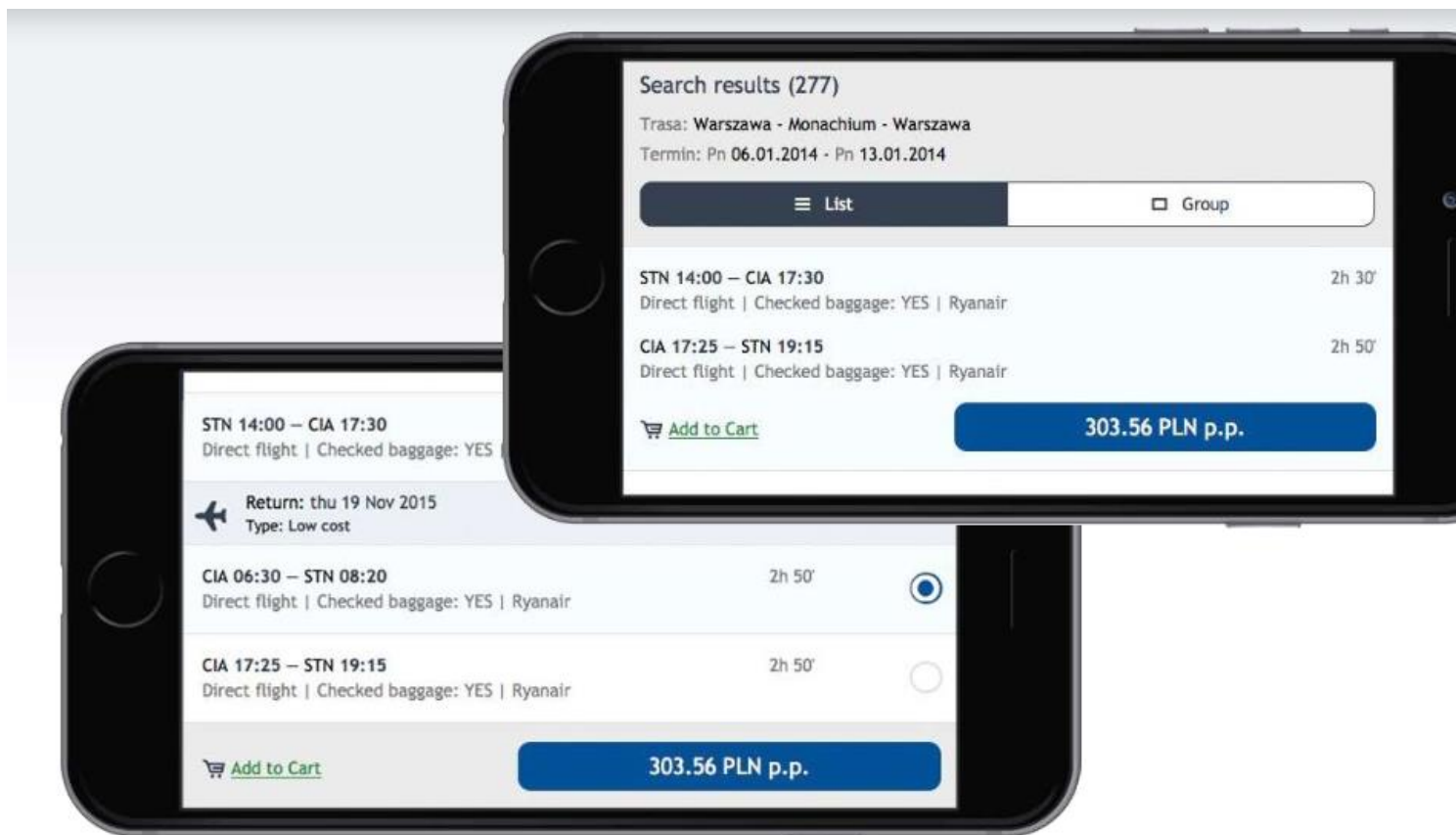


## New Sabre Web Booking Engine (Vacations CMS)

The primary feature of the new Vacations CMS is its adaptability to any mobile devices, in addition to the aforementioned, below are other features:

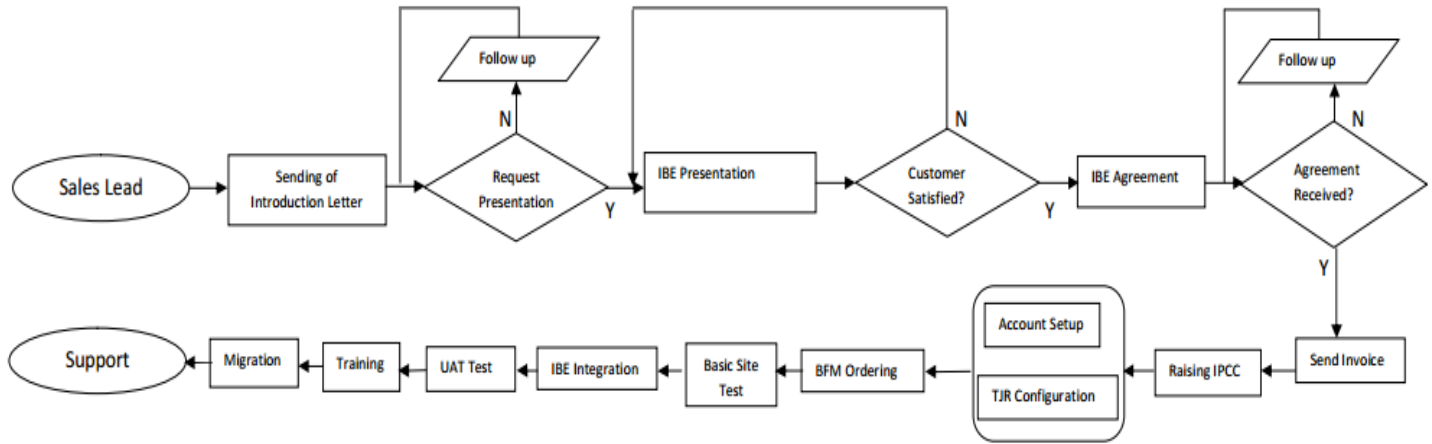
- Full Content management system
- Photos tailored to the type of phone
- The customer holds an offer literally in the palm
- Live room
- More flexible in rule set-up





## Sabre IBE Deployment Flowchart

Below figure shows the flow of IBE project



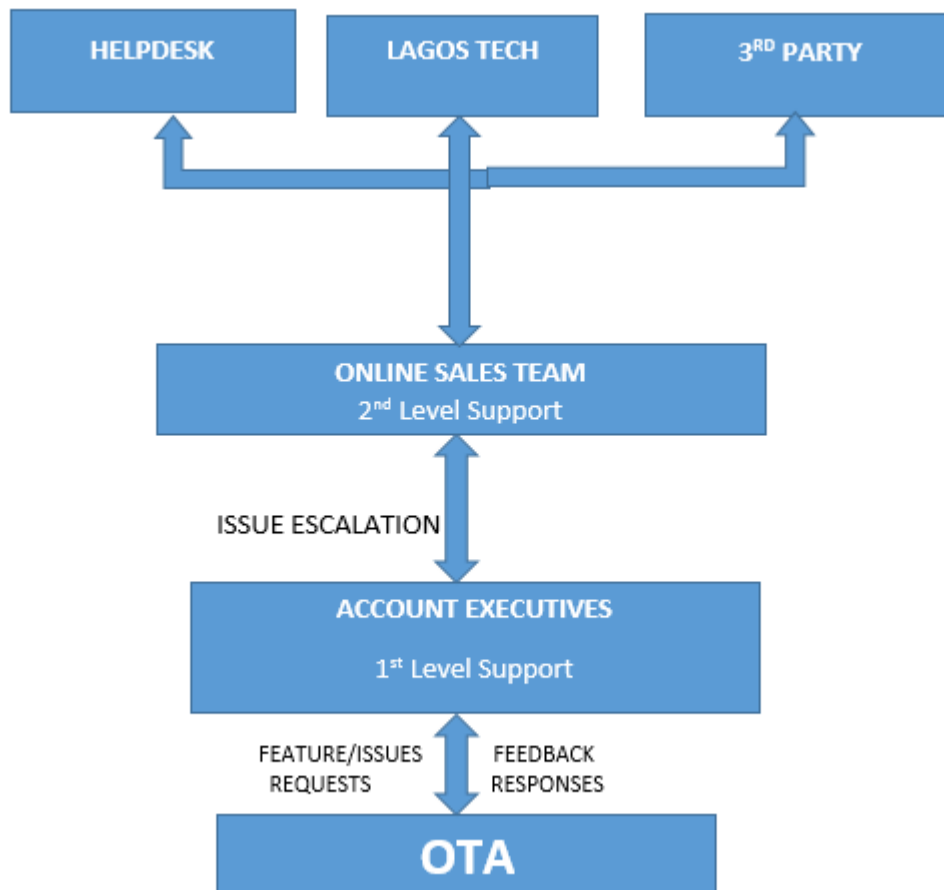
IBE DEPLOYMENT FLOW CHART

## Sabre IBE Deployment workflow (Internal)

S/N	TASKS	DESIGNATION
1	Sales Lead	Any
2	Sending of introduction letter	Account Exe/ OSE
3	IBE Presentation/Demonstration	Account Exe/ OSE
4	IBE Agreement	Sales Department
5	Invoice	Finance Department
6	Raising IPCC (3-4buz days)	OSE
7	TJR Configuration	Helpdesk
8	IBE Setup	OSE
	IBE account setup	ESS
	Basic IBE account configuration	OSE
9	BFM order (3weeks)	OSE
10	Basic Site test	OSE
11	IBE integration	Web designer/OSE
12	UAT Test	OSE
13	Training (Basic/Advance)	OSE/ TRAINING UNIT
14	Migration Period/Programme	ALL UNITS
15	Support	
	1st level support	Account Executive
	2nd level support	Tech/Helpdesk



## Sabre Online Support Structure



## IBE Project Workflow (Customer)

The table below shows the workflow IBE project with the respective action owners.

S/N	STAGE	DESCRIPTION	ACTION OWNER
1	Purchase of Domain	Purchasing of a domain (e.g. www.travels.com) from any website hosting company	Travel Agency   Website designer
2	Purchase of Hosting Package	Purchasing of Hosting Package where the Website folder will resides	Travel Agency   Website designer
3	Procurement of SSL	Securing your Website and Payment Portal from Hackers (e.g. https://travels.com)	Travel Agency   Website designer
4	Website Contents	Write up on About Us, Contact Us, Services, Welcome Notes in a Microsoft word	Travel Agency   Website designer
5	Website Development	Development of company website in a PHP Programming Language	Travel Agency   Website designer
6	Application for Sabre IBE	Presentation & Demonstration of IBE	Sabre Online Team
		Sending of IBE agreement	Sabre Sales Dept.
		Acknowledgment and Signing of agreement	Travel Agency Travels
		Sending of Invoice	Sabre Finance Dept.
		Payment and confirmation	Travel Agency   Sabre Finance Dept.

## Online Booking and Sales

S/N	STAGE	DESCRIPTION	ACTION OWNER
7	Request for IPCC	Sabre procures IPCC for the Internet Booking Engine which takes 7 working days	Sabre Online Team
8	Configuration IPCC	TJR and related Configuration	Helpdesk
9	Configuration of IBE Credentials	Sabre setups IBE credentials for the Website Owner for Integration Purpose	Sabre Online Team
10	Request for BFM	Procured IBE credential will be moved to BFM Prod which takes Six Weeks	Sabre Online Team
11	Integration of IBE with Travel Agency 's Website	Sabre IT Team work with the Website Designer to integrate the Internet Booking Engine	Sabre   Website Designer   Travel Agency
12	Integration of Payment Gateway	Application for Online credentials from the PayPal and forwarded to sabre.	Travel Agency
		Integration of the Credentials with the IBE	Sabre Online Team
14	Training and Migration	Sabre IT Team schedule a training on B2C, B2B, B2B2C and management	Sabre Online Team

To send IBE agreement, a prospective customer will fill below form and forward to Sabre online sales team

<b>AGENCY NAME</b>	
<b>PCC</b>	
<b>IATA No</b>	
<b>WEBSITE URL</b>	
<b>CONTACT PERSON</b>	
<b>EMAIL</b>	
<b>TELEPHONE</b>	
<b>ADDRESS</b>	

## Introduction of Sabre IBE to Customer

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Below extract is a sample of introduction email of IBE to prospective customers

We are glad to introduce our newly improved Internet Booking Engine (IBE), a perfect way to start your selling online!

Simply, **B2C, B2E, B2B2C & B2B** (B2B to enhance sub agents consolidation) booking facility can be integrated into your existing website.

The solution offers full e-commerce for flight bookings and guaranteed reservation for hotels and cars (Cars and Hotels are optional). Your customers will receive a branded booking confirmation and the reservations will be placed onto your queue for ticketing or can be auto-ticketed.

Once implemented, you have full control of your website. Our Flight Deck administration module allows you to change and amend mark-ups, transaction fees, airline and airport display options, booking file information, colours and various other settings and defaults.

For this product, Sabre Nigeria is in partner with a private developer in developing the booking engine while the API is provided by Sabre.

We can meet with you to discuss on the commercial of this solution.

Online payment Gateway can be through – UBA, GT Banks and Interswitch.

Booking and Payment is done online, the booking will drop it into your Sabre queue and you can contact the customers to make payment for Book and Hold while the ticket is issued later or auto ticketed.

## Contact Information

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