

THE STATE OF THE U.S. TRAVEL APPS ECONOMY

Analyzing the quality of apps in the travel industry.

By Ben Gray



Executive Summary:

How do your customers in the U.S. rate the quality of your travel brand's mobile app across Android and iOS? This report answers that question and provides IT, product and marketing leaders with a benchmark of the quality of mobile apps across 31 of the largest travel brands, including Delta, Hertz, TripAdvisor and United, and 5 industries, including airlines, car rentals, cruise, hotels and travel booking. We also show the highest- and lowest-rated travel brands and industries. IT, product and marketing leaders should use this report to discover how customers rate your mobile app quality, understand your competitive landscape and set goals for optimizing your app quality management practices in 2015 as you proceed along the path to a winning travel app, as defined by your customers.

The State Of The U.S. Travel Apps Economy

Until today, no one has attempted to document the state of app quality across the modern apps economy. Until today, no one had the tools to measure customer sentiment as channeled through app store ratings and reviews. Until today, enterprise brands were flying blind on what customers love and hate about your mobile apps and lacked an open benchmark with which to compare your app quality against your competitors'. Until today.

Introducing ARC 360's Travel Report

Applause, the 360° app quality company, has commissioned this inaugural *ARC 360* report on the state of the U.S. travel apps economy to help the world's largest travel companies in the U.S. - and those that compete against them - to understand how customers perceive your app quality and to rapidly improve the experience for your mobile users. And we've also launched a retail edition, with plans to release additional industry editions in subsequent months. *Suggestions welcome.*

Study Methodology

In order to build the travel mobile app quality index, ARC 360:

- Selected the top 49 travel brands as defined by distinguished industry sources and independent research and analysis companies that specialize in marketshare tracking and revenue reporting.

- Determined whether these 49 travel brands offered a mobile app across Android and iOS. If they offered more than one, we selected the flagship app that serves as the front door to their brand. If they didn't offer a mobile app, we excluded them from the index - but hope to see them appear in subsequent editions of this ARC 360 travel report.
- Analyzed the quality of the travel apps using [Applause Analytics](#), a mobile app analytics tool that crawls every rating and review from the top apps stores, including Apple App Store and Google Play. Applause Analytics reports a mobile app quality score, as defined by customers, on a scale of 0 to 100.

The Travel Apps Economy Spans 5 Industries

Of the 49 travel brands selected to participate, only 31 qualified for the Applause travel mobile app quality index. This is due to travel brands not yet delivering a mobile app to the Android and iOS markets or not receiving enough customer feedback on the quality of the apps via app store ratings and reviews in the U.S.

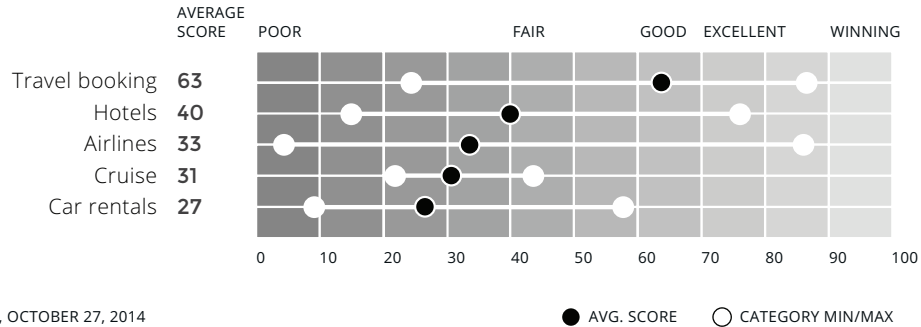
The distribution of mobile app quality scores varied significantly across the 5 travel industries, with travel bookings standing out with an average app quality score of 63 across Android and iOS and car rentals rounding out the list with a 27 average app quality score. Here's how customers rated the 5 travel industries within today's modern apps economy (see Figure 1):

APP TRENDS:

Did you know that across more than 200 million apps in the US app stores, the average app quality score is 66.5? In other words, a "D" - a passing grade but nothing to write home about.

FIGURE 1

APPLAUSE TRAVEL MOBILE APP QUALITY INDEX - MINIMUM, AVERAGE & MAXIMUM SCORE



SOURCE: APPLAUSE ANALYTICS, OCTOBER 27, 2014

Defining The App Quality Scale

Across each of the 5 travel industries, Applause measured the app quality sentiment of Android and iOS users and plotted the resulting app quality scores as defined by customers on a scale of: Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent and Winning. For each of these classifications, travel app quality scores ranged from:

- **Poor:** 0 to 39 (apps with which customers are disappointed)
- **Fair:** 40 to 59 (apps customers tolerate because they serve a purpose)
- **Good:** 60 to 69 (apps that customers like)
- **Excellent:** 70 to 89 (apps that customers love)
- **Winning:** 90 to 100 (apps that win customers' applause)

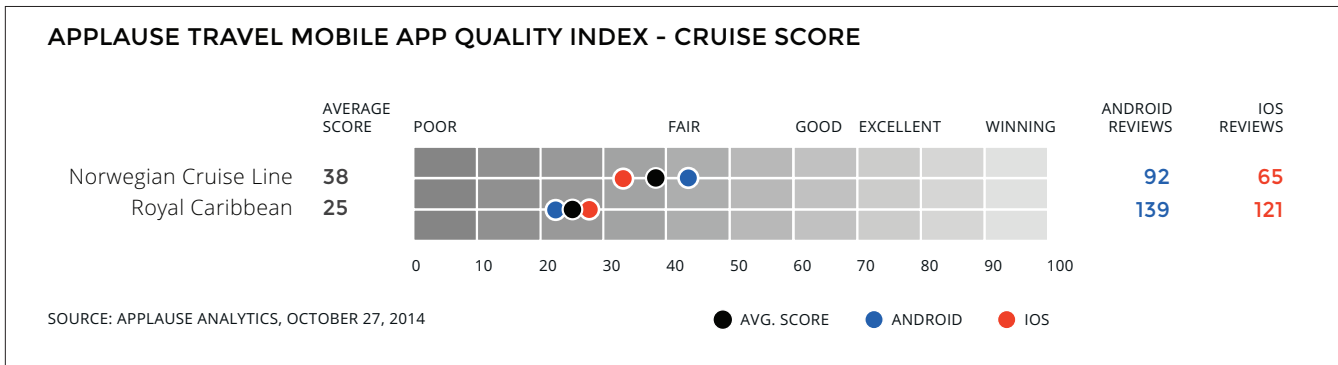
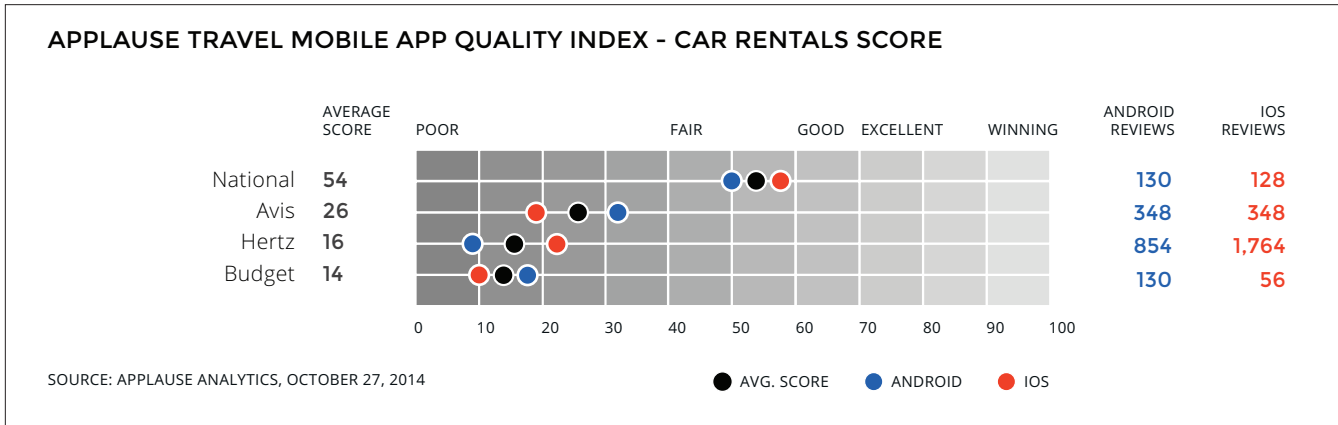
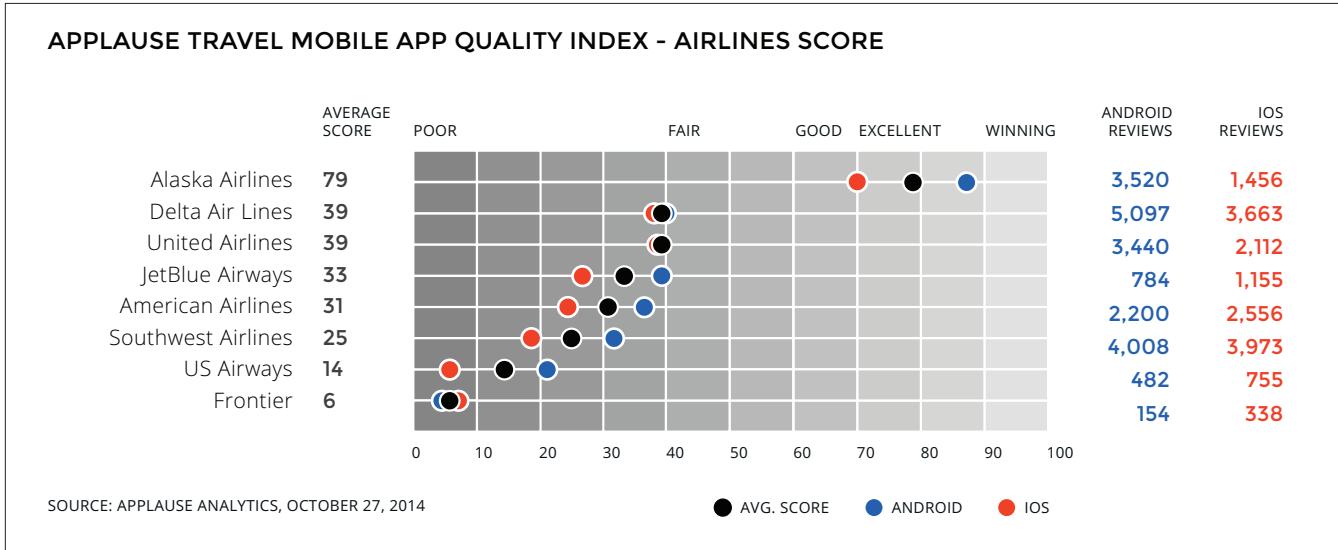
The Good, The Bad And The Ugly Of Travel

Some customers' ratings of travel apps really stood out, for both good and bad reasons (see Figure 2). Some of the best and worst travel brands for app quality as defined by their customers include:

- The five travel brands that achieved more than 20,000 app store ratings and reviews and an average app quality score above 66.5 across both Android and iOS are [Booking.com](#) (average app quality score of 85 across 25,278 reviews), [TripAdvisor](#) (average app quality score of 78 across 51,774 reviews), [Kayak](#) (average app quality score of 77 across 29,213 reviews), [TripIt](#) (average app quality score of 73 across 20,494 reviews) and [Hotels.com](#) (average app quality score of 67 across 22,578 reviews).
- The four travel app quality leaders for Android are Booking.com ([Android](#)), TripAdvisor ([Android](#)), Hotels.com ([Android](#)) and Kayak ([Android](#)). Each of these travel brands earned an app quality score of more than 70 with each score powered by more than 10,000 Google Play reviews. It's worth nothing that both TripIt ([Android](#)) and Agoda ([Android](#)) are well on their way to achieving a similar threshold for app quality but fall short to date on the number of reviews.
- The three travel app quality leaders for iOS are TripAdvisor ([iOS](#)), Kayak ([iOS](#)) and TripIt ([iOS](#)), with an honorable mention for Booking.com ([iOS](#)). These travel brands earned app quality scores of 70 or above and their scores were powered by more than 10,000 reviews, while Booking.com fell just short with 7,662 reviews to date.
- Five airline brands - [Southwest Airlines](#), [American Airlines](#), [JetBlue](#), [Delta Air Lines](#) and [United Airlines](#), as well as car rental company [Hertz](#), stood out as app quality laggards as defined by their customers for both Android and iOS. These six major travel brands earned poor app quality scores (below 40) across both Android and iOS across approximately 2,000 or more app store reviews. There isn't a common attribute that needs significant improvement, which could have served as a quick fix to improve app quality. Instead these travel brands should consider implementing an SDK to track bugs and crashes and consider engaging earlier with users with future builds via a beta management program.
- Some of the lowest average scores with a lower bar for number of reviews belonged to [Frontier Airlines](#) (6 average app quality score across 492 reviews), [Hilton](#) (18 average app quality score across 764 reviews), [Avis](#) (26 average app quality score across 696 reviews) and [Hyatt](#) (28 average app quality score across 361 reviews). Each of these brands should take this as an opportunity to redefine its app quality approach to better serve its customers in their mobile moments (see additional commentary in the Recommendations section below).



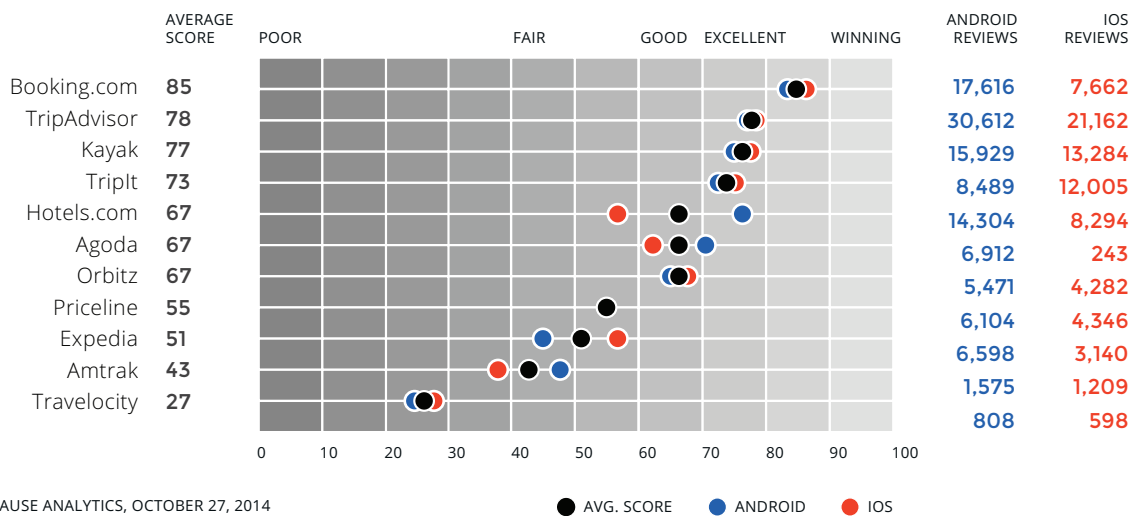
FIGURE 2



APPLAUSE TRAVEL MOBILE APP QUALITY INDEX - HOTELS SCORE



APPLAUSE TRAVEL MOBILE APP QUALITY INDEX - TRAVEL BOOKING SCORE



RECOMMENDATIONS

The Path To Winning Apps, As Defined By Customers

Every brand in the Applause travel mobile app quality index is proceeding along its own path to delivering a winning mobile app to customers. But whether you're able to achieve winning status as rated by your customers — not to mention retain that standing over time — and at what rate you earn it really depends on where you landed in the mobile app quality index.

- **TRAVEL BRANDS WITH APPS RATED AS POOR** need to fundamentally re-focus their efforts on serving customers in their mobile moments, because if your app doesn't serve customer needs in their everyday interactions then prepare to sit back and watch as your competitors do. From booking an itinerary, to selecting seats, to scanning a mobile boarding pass, to looking up flight info, to checking flight status, to connecting to on-board Wi-Fi, to checking loyalty status, your apps have to work every time, for everyone, across every device, OS, network and location. And with the recent launch of iOS 8 and Android 5.0 Lollipop, now is the perfect time to rethink your development and testing strategy in the age of the customer.
- **TRAVEL BRANDS WITH APPS RATED AS FAIR** need to expand testing out of the lab and into the real world, where conditions can disrupt the user experience. Too many travel companies test almost exclusively in an internal test lab or via a traditional outsourced model, which simply relocates the test lab. But winning mobile apps demand additional testing where users naturally interact with your digital experiences. And with new travel technologies like biometric passports, self-driving cars, space airlines and beyond, testing in the lab is a great start but in-the-wild testing is a necessity to ensure your digital experiences hold up to real world use cases.
- **TRAVEL BRANDS WITH APPS RATED AS GOOD** should expand their development and testing efforts from functional to usability, localization, load/performance and security. Because today's user expectations are incredibly

lofty, your apps have to do more than work. They have to be intuitive, offer rock solid stability, perform quickly, shine under pressure and keep your customer information secure and private. But the No. 1 goal of your apps is to delight your users — when and where they want to interact with your brand. Your apps need to drive repeat usage, deeper engagement and user loyalty for your brand and your business. Because even a free app has implications on your business and your reputation.

- **TRAVEL BRANDS WITH APPS RATED AS EXCELLENT** should engage early with users on new builds as a means of identifying issues before your customers do and to narrow future testing efforts on the most urgent issues that are preventing you from achieving winning app quality status. As an example, most of the indexed travel apps fared particularly poorly on elegance, security, privacy and stability (versus satisfaction, content, interoperability, performance or pricing, for example). Most travel companies could immediately benefit from usability, security and automated mobile functional testing to turn their most glaring app quality weaknesses into strengths.
- **TRAVEL BRANDS WITH APPS RATED AS WINNING** must monitor ongoing user feedback to improve over time. Whether users love or hate your apps, they're going to be incredibly vocal via social channels and app store ratings and reviews. There's no clearer voice of the customer than the one that's already shouting at you with app store ratings and reviews from your most passionate fans and critics alike. For any travel brand that wants to improve its app quality standing through the eyes of your customers — and we hope that's everyone — it's important to listen to and act on customer feedback. [arc](#)

About ARC 360

ARC 360 from Applause is a research group dedicated to providing insights and data on the apps economy. ARC 360 leverages data from a variety of sources, including proprietary Applause data, to provide a 360° view of app quality. ARC 360 combines this data, with analysis, into reports to help brands and app developers understand what is happening in the apps economy.

Learn more at <http://arc.applause.com/>.

About Applause Analytics

Combing through millions of ratings and user reviews submitted across millions of apps in the iOS and Android app stores around the world, Applause Analytics closes the gap between mobile app developers and their customers, generating actionable insights and quantifiable metrics based on what users are actually saying about their app experiences.

Learn more at www.applause.com/analytics.