Deloitte AI360 Podcast

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Geroge Ivanov, Travel and Hospitality Sector Agentic Lead

Title:	How Agentic AI Is Revolutionizing the Travel and Hospitality Industries
Description:	Head of AI at Deloitte, Jim Rowan, talks with George Ivanov about how AI is reshaping guest experiences and operations in travel and hospitality.
Duration:	7:18

Jim Rowan: George, welcome to our AI360 podcast.

George Ivanov: Hi Jim, good morning. Thank you for having me.

Jim Rowan: Of course, man, great to see you. So George, why don't you tell me a little bit about what your role is here in Deloitte and what you're working on?

George Ivanov: Sure thing. George Ivanoff. I lead our AI and agentic services efforts in the travel and hospitality sector at Deloitte, and I spend most of my time working with hotels, restaurants, and airlines, helping them reimagine their guest experiences to drive growth and operational efficiencies. What really excites me about this space is that we're at this incredible inflection point where AI is just fundamentally reshaping how these companies understand and serve their customers. And so I work with clients to navigate this transformation and to ensure that they're not just adopting agentic AI, but doing so in ways that create sustainable, competitive advantage and value for their customers.

Jim Rowan: That's great, George. And it's such an interesting space, too, because your clients are really at the intersection point with consumers that are trying to get more access to AI capabilities and sometimes the enterprise ends up having access to. Could you just give me a little more of a current-state assessment of what's going on in the industry?

George Ivanov: I think we're witnessing an AI renaissance of sorts in travel and hospitality. The sector has moved beyond basic automation and chatbots to what I call invisible hospitality, which is essentially AI systems that don't just respond to requests, but anticipate them. And so with that in mind, there are really three overarching shifts in the market that we're seeing currently. First, there is a fundamental change in data strategy. Companies are moving from siloed property-level data to unified intelligence across customer touchpoints in order to create more comprehensive customer profiles. Second, we're seeing a shift from reactive to proactive service models. The old paradigm was request and respond. The new paradigm is predict and deliver. And so, AI systems are now analyzing patterns to anticipate needs before guests even articulate them. Third, and perhaps the most significant, is just the sheer proliferation of AI capabilities, and AI technologies that were once exclusive only to major players are now accessible to essentially any company in the space, and that creates a rising tide of innovation across the entire sector. The result of all this is hospitality that feels almost telepathic, essentially hospitality at the core of which is the ability to anticipate needs that guests didn't even know they have.

Jim Rowan: Wow. All right. Well, I love the future—what that experience sounds like. What are some example use cases that clients are going for in the space that are really starting to generate value as they've moved from these chatbots, as you mentioned, into more telepathic capabilities and feelings, and in your hospitality experience?

George Ivanov: Yeah, absolutely. Let me share three concrete examples of AI driving value in the heart of the business. I'll start with personalization. Here, one of my favorite examples is a major hotel chain which is using predictive preference matching where they essentially analyze past dates and preferences to curate personalized welcomes before check-in. So if you are arriving on an overnight flight, for example, the system may suggest a spa treatment for jet lag. And so, through this approach, they've been able to drive double-digit increases in ancillary revenues as well as guest satisfaction scores. On the operational side, one airline, for example, is using AI for dynamic gate optimization, which analyzes real-time data on arrivals, connections, and crew schedules and minimizes taxiing time. And with this application, they've been able to reduce delays by 30%. The last example I'll give is around service recovery. Here, one theme park operator deployed AI disruption agents that detect wait time spikes and attraction closures, and then proactively reach out to guests with alternatives and vouchers before these guests even realize there's a problem. In doing so, this company has been able to cut complaints by 40%, and more importantly, they have essentially turned a potentially negative customer experience into a moment that enhances and reinforces brand loyalty. The commonality across all three examples is that customers experience the benefit of AI without even knowing that AI is working, which, in my opinion, is exactly what great hospitality should feel like.

Jim Rowan: That's awesome. These are some great use cases that I think impact our daily lives on a regular basis, so it's probably a personal desire to make sure these all work really well for us. So, I mean, it can't be all roses though and sunshine on this side—those are great examples, but what are some of the challenges that organizations are facing here?

George Ivanov: Yes, from what we see, the AI challenges are not strictly technical. They're less about the AI models and much more about data integration and what we call the AI trust gap. In terms of trust, hospitality companies really handle incredibly sensitive data: travel patterns, spending habits, location data, etc. And to address this AI trust gap, some clients are now starting to implement federated learning approaches where AI models are trained on guest data without the data ever leaving individual properties. And so this maintains privacy while also enabling personalization at scale. The data integration complexity is equally challenging because many travel and hospitality companies have legacy systems that just weren't designed to share any data. And one airline client, for example, solved this by creating a data mesh architecture, essentially building intelligent middleware that translates between all the new systems and allows AI to access historical data without necessitating a complete system overhaul.

Jim Rowan: George, those are great. And this whole idea of kind of solving for the data privacy technology/trust equations seems so important for organizations. What's your advice for leaders? They've got these great use cases and challenges trying to adopt. What's your advice for leaders on how to tackle this going forward in the next 12 months or so?

George Ivanov: My advice to travel and hospitality leaders is start with the customer journey, not with the technology. Identify the moments that matter most to your guests and focus your AI efforts there first, because this would create immediate, measurable value and would also give you organizational confidence and momentum. In parallel, invest in your data foundation before attempting to deploy AI at scale. And finally, think ecosystem, not just technology, because the most successful AI implementations usually involve partnerships— partnerships with technology providers, with service providers, with data companies, in some cases, even partnerships with competitors.

Jim Rowan: George, I love it. This is really great. Thanks so much for your insights and all the work you're doing in the travel and hospitality space. I know it'll personally benefit us on our business travels and hopefully some personal travels in the future. And really appreciate all that great advice for our leaders that are looking to embrace AI. Thanks for joining us on the podcast, George.

George Ivanov: My pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Jim Rowan: Take care.

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