
HOTSPOTS I:

ERIK BLACHFORD PRESIDENT, EXPEDIA (NORTH AMERICA)

Mark, thanks so much for inviting me to FiRe 2008. It's amazing to me that this is now the fifth year of the conference. It's really going strong.

I know you asked me to give a bunch of predictions about the future, but you know I really think it's more interesting to look back at so much that's happened, because I was going to talk about travel. I'm kind of a travel guy, Expedia and all. Oh, prediction #1? *I bet* I will become president and CEO of Expedia Inc. *[Laughter]*

I was going to give you a bunch of predictions about where things are going to go over the next five years, but I had such a lousy trip down here today that I thought I would just talk about the stuff that still doesn't work right.

The first thing that happened was I was looking to book my room here at the Hotel Del, and as most of you know, a couple of years ago we finally cracked the nut of being able to hold all of the hotels' inventory in cache all the time, so that you can actually pick the particular room you want to stay in. My favorite room was booked, so I had to pick the one next door to it. I was able to look at the room plan, I was able to get a sense of the view and so forth, but I forgot to configure the minibar, so I got here and it was all of the fattening stuff, and what I like is the healthy stuff. *My fault* – but still, what a nightmare.

However, it started much earlier than that, because when I got to the airport in Seattle, of course I took out my phone. I took out the security chip to go past the line – remember when everybody had to wait in the security lines, and there was no way to just be secure and go right by the line? It's amazing to me. But it worked, at least, which I was happy about.

But then things started to go a little bit sideways. Again I checked in, again using the chip in my phone... got onto the plane, got up into the air, got moving, and the in-flight access was down. The hotspot wasn't working on the plane.

And I just thought to myself, Is there *anything* more frustrating than not being able to get to your TiVo server when you're flying down the coast? *[Laughter]* What are you going to do, watch live TV? Wasn't it great when there used to be more than one carrier flying up and down the West Coast? *[Laughter]*

Anyway, eventually I got down here to San Diego and managed to navigate my way to a Starbucks, which was fairly easy to do – just used the location base, the GPS on my phone, and found myself there. Unfortunately, I had to use the display *on* my phone, which was kind of irritating. I didn't bring a display down with me, and the good folks at Avis – for whatever reason, they were out of the rental displays, so I couldn't pick one up from them, but happily the folks here at the Hotel Del have set me up with one, so I, like all of you, can easily get access right here from my seat.

I think that for now what I'm going to do is probably go back, reclaim my seat, and enjoy the rest of the conference, but I do hope that maybe next year when I'm back here I can give you a little bit of a look into the future and where things are going to be in terms of travel experiences instead of having to sit up here and whinge about the way things are today. Thanks.