



Travel

VOICE SEARCH

A deep dive into verticals

April 2018

ROAST[™]



Intro

ROAST are a full service digital agency passionate about driving performance for our clients. As an independent business, we are able to be nimble and continually evolve and grow. This agile nature allows us to explore latest trends and capitalise effectively on industry developments. At ROAST we are forward thinking and enjoy working with clients who share this mentality.

One way that we drive ROI for our clients is by exploring new ad types, devices and ways to connect with the user. Since the launch of smart speakers with built in assistants, such as the Amazon Echo (Nov 2014) and Google Home (Nov 2017), we've been interested in the mechanics of voice search, how people are using the devices and how our clients could engage with these interactions.

Our whitepapers aim to show a deep understanding of current industry topics and provide the tools to maximise performance as the digital landscape evolves.

In January 2018 we launched the industry's first Voice Search Ranking Report and released a whitepaper on the state of voice search. This whitepaper is the second part of our Voice Search study, which takes a deep dive into 22 different verticals.

This whitepaper focuses on the travel vertical. The travel vertical is a highly competitive and price-driven industry dominated by OTAs and package holiday providers, with constant new competition in the race to drive prices as low as possible. The utilisation of strong above the line campaigns and early adoption of the latest SEO developments means that the tech-savvy travel company is firmly placed to grab consumers in their research stages and beyond.

Voice search is a new battle ground for travel sites with certain companies, particularly flight operators and hotels, already having a headstart with their existing visibility on Google's hotel and flight search framework.

How this report works

- For this report we used a total of 479 key phrases
- The report was carried out the 9th of March 2018
- For this report we used a Google Home Assistant device
- This document contains summary information, observations and top line strategy recommendations
- The attached spreadsheet contains the raw Voice Search Ranking Report, lists each key phrase, the response from the Google Home Assistant and the classification of the response. We have also gathered if Google was showing a featured snippet answer box result for the same key phrase on the same day. We list the type of answer box (Paragraph, List, Table), and which domain and URL Google extracted the featured snippet answer box from.

Example key phrases

- holidays to Mexico
- visa to America
- flights to Italy
- currency for Thailand
- Spain villa holidays

See the attached spreadsheet for all key phrases



Findings

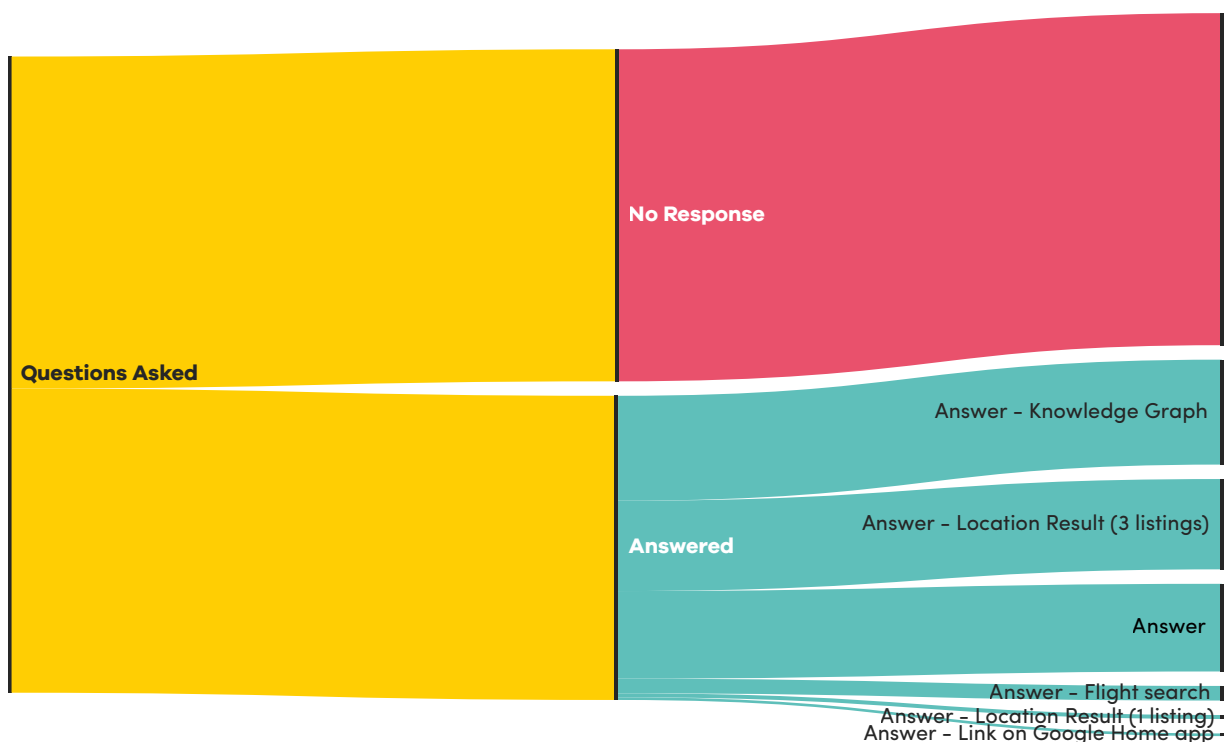
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Flow graph

The diagram below shows the flow of results from the 479 key phrases asked.

- The Google Assistant wasn't able to answer 250 of the queries
- For 229 key phrases the assistant gave:
 - 79 Answers were pulled from a Knowledge Graph
 - 71 were Location Results
 - 66 were standard answers, usually (but not exclusively) from Answer Box Results
 - 11 triggered a Flight Search
 - And 2 linked to an external website (Virgin Holidays) via the Google Home app



This vertical gave us one of the more diverse selection of results, almost equally divided between knowledge graph, location results and standard answers.

Knowledge Graph results

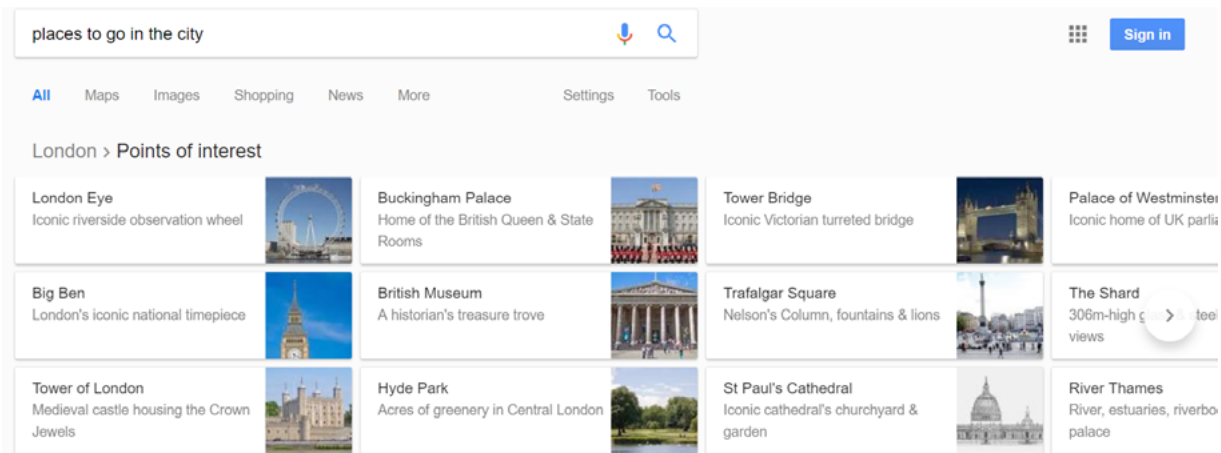
The majority of key phrases that had a knowledge graph voice response were focused on destinations, e.g. “what is the currency in Thailand”, “islands in Japan” or “things to do in Mexico”. But there were also a few queries that didn't mention an explicit destination and would have taken into consideration the location of the test, for example:

User – “Ok Google, places to go in the city”

Google Assistant – “Attractions in London include London Eye, Big Ben, and others”

As our test took place in London, Google picked London attractions to read out. These results are being pulled from Google's own knowledge graph, rather than being pulled from a specific website.

On the web, the results for these queries looks like this:



It would be very difficult to try to overcome this result with a featured snippet from your own website. However, it could be possible to optimise the knowledge graph result to add your attraction to the top results.

Location results

Location results are where Google reads out an answer based on what location you included in your query, or if your location is not included in the query, based on your IP.

Type	Example Search	Example Result
Answer - Location Result (1 listing)	Nearest place to visit	Somerset House is on The Strand in London. You can say directions , call or next
Answer - Location Result (2 listings)	Chester accommodation (None for this vertical)	There are at least 2 listings. The 1st one is Clarendon Serviced Apartments - Chester House, on Chester House, 14 Eccleston Place in London. You can say directions , call or next
Answer - Location Result (3 listings)	Best resorts in Thailand	There are at least 3 listings. The 1st one is Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui, Thailand, on 219 Moo 5 in Anghong. You can say directions , call or next
Answer - Location Result (3 listings) - Old Style	Spain luxury holidays	I found a few places. The 1st one is Gran Hotel La Perla at Plaza del Castillo, 1 in Pamplona. The 2nd one is Mandarin Oriental, Barcelona at Passeig de Gracia, 38-40 in Barcelona. The 3rd one is Hotel Maria Cristina, a Luxury Collection Hotel, San Sebastian at Republica Argentina Kalea, 4 in San Sebastian.

What are the different results?

Running this test at the start of 2018 we only observed Google giving out 3 listings, reading one after another.

Running the tests in March we now see Google stating how many results it's found, it then reads out the first result, pauses and then gives the user three options: directions, call, or next.

The software we use to run our reports moves onto the next key phrase, rather than asking for the next result.

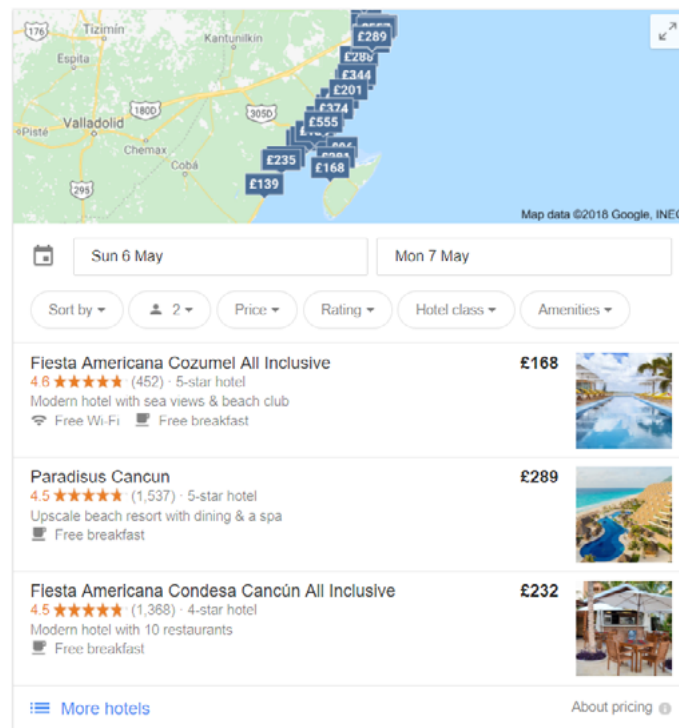
Where does Google get the data from?

The data for the locations comes from Google My Business listings. We've tested a subset of key phrases and the voice search results were sometimes very different to the web results.

User - "Ok Google, Mexico resorts all inclusive"

Google Assistant - "There are at least 3 listings. The 1st one is: LE BLANC SPA RESORT, on Boulevard Kukulcan Km.10, Zona Hotelera in Cancún. You can say: directions, call, or next."

A search from the same IP on an incognito chrome search did not display this destination at all:



Google My Business listings are owned by the individual hotels, resorts or attractions. This means holiday companies such as Expedia, Hotels.com and Booking.com are not going to have any visibility on these types of results.

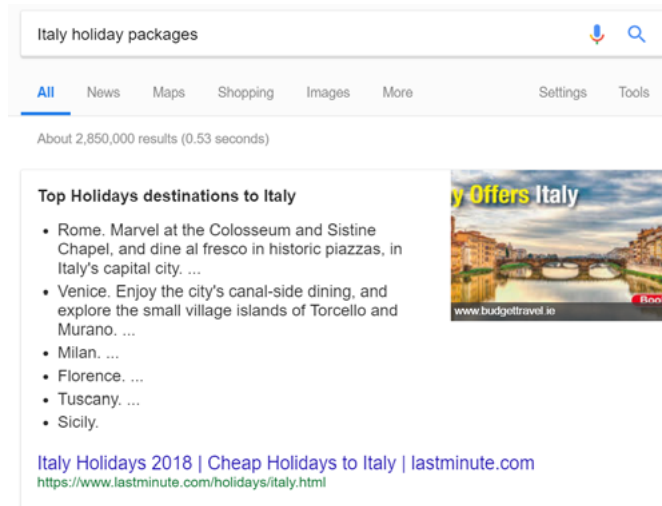
Standard answers & answer box matching

This vertical saw the Google Assistant read out 66 standard answers (29% of responses);

User - "Ok Google, Italy holiday packages"

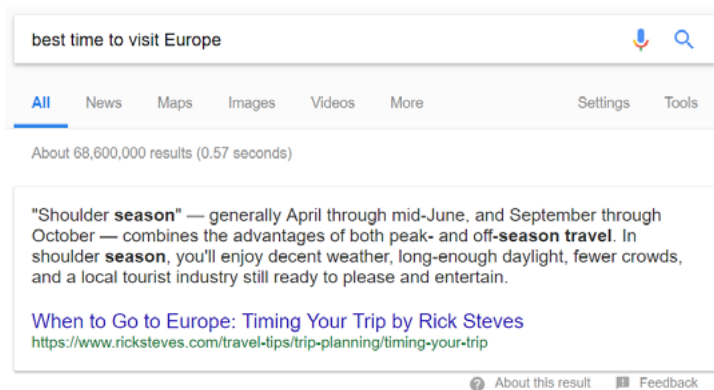
Google Assistant – “Here's a summary from the website lastminute.com: Top Holidays destinations to Italy: Rome, Venice, Milan, Florence, Tuscany and Sicily.”

Google will gather this information from featured snippet answer boxes:



However, there are times when the voice search result doesn't match the answer box on the web and it pulls the information from another domain.

For example; “best time to visit Europe” Google shows a featured snippet answer box from Ricksteves.com:



However, the voice search result was from another domain:

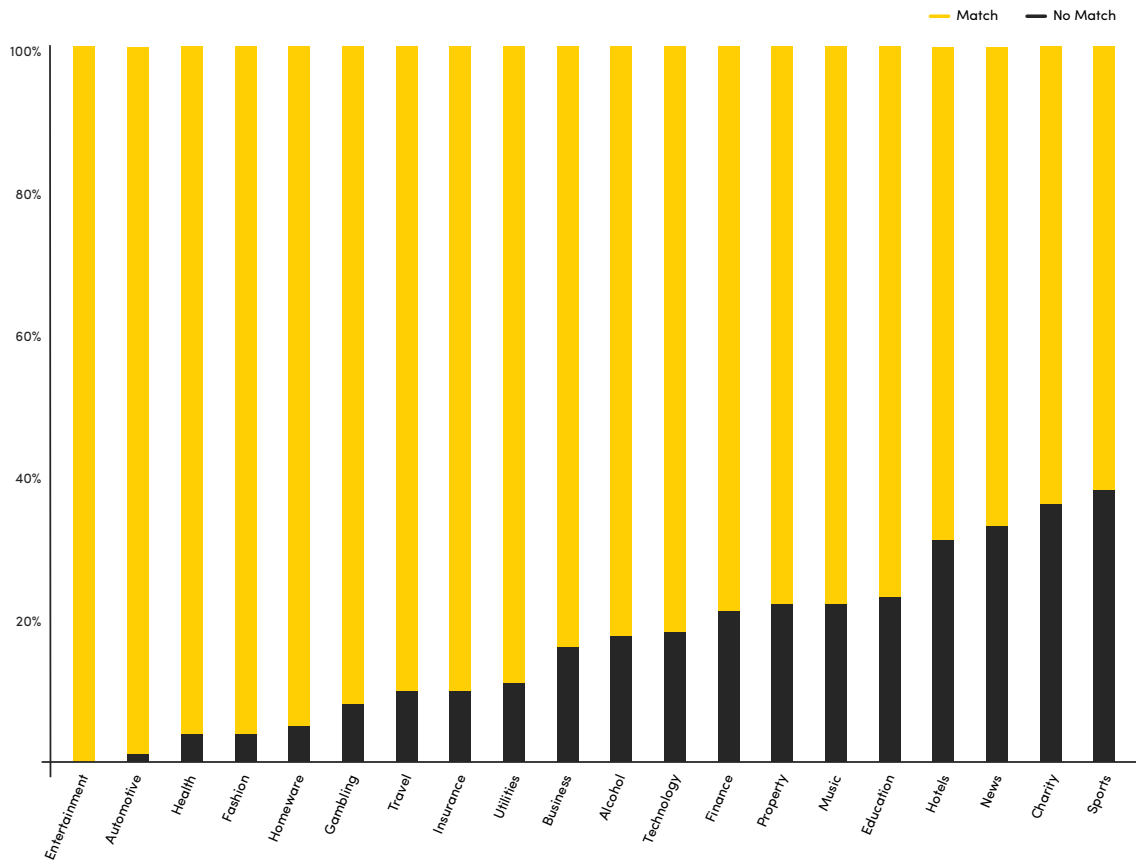
Google Assistant – “On the website [traveltips.usatoday.com](https://www.traveltips.usatoday.com), they say: 'Generally, ideal times to visit Europe are May, June and September, when prices are reasonable. Crowds are then smaller; the weather is typically agreeable during those months as well.'”

We can see how often this happens by comparing the difference in the number of featured snippet answer boxes to the assistant answers:

What % of assistant answers matched the answer box?

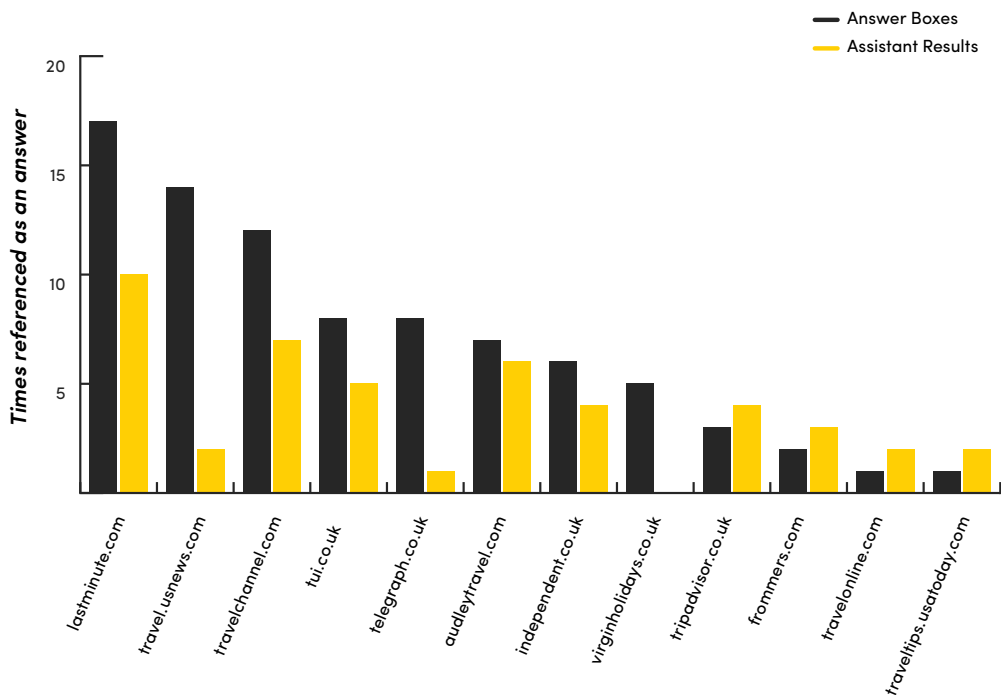


The travel vertical saw an 84% match of standard voice assistant answers to the featured snippet answer boxes on the web. Compared to other verticals this is quite high:



We can also track which websites in the travel vertical are performing the best on featured snippet answer boxes and voice answer results:

Domains referenced as an answer



Answer - Link on Google Home app

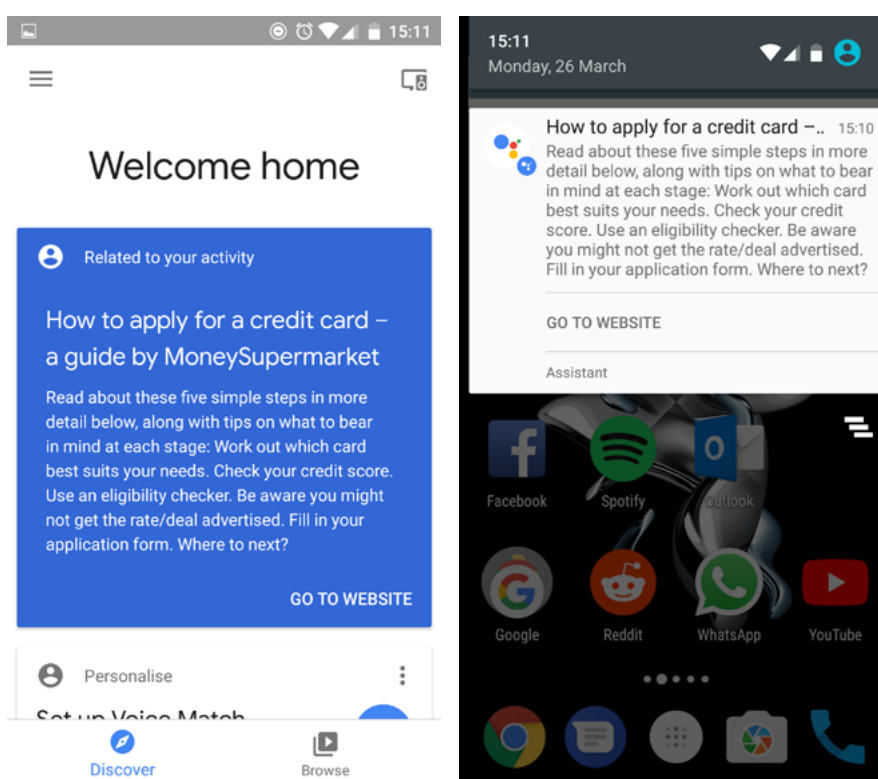
Interestingly, even though Virgin Holidays didn't appear for any voice responses, it was recommended twice via the Google Home app. The Google Home app allows you to control all the settings on devices such as Chromecasts, Home Speakers etc.

How this works as a voice response:

User – “Ok Google, Holiday in Thailand”

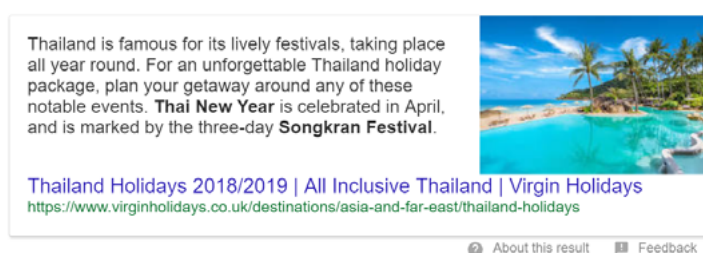
Google Assistant – “I don't have an exact answer, but on [virginholidays.co.uk](https://www.virginholidays.co.uk), I found a page called Thailand holidays 2018/2019. All-inclusive Thailand. If you want to read more, follow the link I just sent to your phone.”

On opening the Google Home app, the user would then be presented with the option to click on the referenced URL. The example below is from a credit card key phrase:



In the Virgin Holidays example, Google has a page that is relevant to the key phrase (<https://www.virginholidays.co.uk/destinations/asia-and-far-east/thailand-holidays>) but it's not been able to read out answer. The page was ranking 1st in the web search results on the same day but no answer box appeared.

It is most likely that if relevant content was added to such pages, Google would be able to generate an answer box and then provide a standard answer on voice search rather than suggesting a link. We've already seen an answer box appearing sporadically, but Google isn't confident enough to add it permanently:



Of course, this could also be an intentional move in order to drive traffic to the page and retain user engagement. With broader queries like “holiday in Thailand” where there is no exact or quick answer, prompting the consumer to move to a screen can be the logical next step e.g. with recipes.

Actions

Engaging users past the initial voice response is where “actions” come in. Actions are “apps” for assistant devices which add extra functionality to the device. For example, Dominoes have an action which allows you to order a pizza. In order to do this, you will have to first ask the voice assistant to ‘talk to Dominoes’ to open the action.

However, if Google can’t find an answer to a question they might suggest opening an action which could help the user. This is known as “**Implicit invocation**”.

Actions by third-party developers allow for conversations between the user and device, which then can talk to an external service which returns a piece of information.... or orders you a pizza!

For example, in the travel question above, there could be an action called “Find a Holiday”

User – “Ok Google, holiday in Thailand”

Google Assistant – “Ok, for that, you can talk to Find a Holiday. Does that sound good?”

User – “Yes”

Google: Find a Holiday – “Hi, it's Find a Holiday here. How many adults and children would you like to take to Thailand?”

User – “Five adults, zero children”

Google: Find a Holiday – “Great. What’s your maximum budget for your holiday per person?”

....

In this example the action could talk to an API which contains holiday packages, it then returns a selection of suitable holidays according to the questions shown.

In this example, a Google Home speaker reading out the end results wouldn’t be a great experience, however sending a deeplink which takes you into an app, or displaying the results on a screen or an email, could be a better user experience.

The key here is that Google can match up questions it can’t answer to actions that third-party developers have created. This could be the crucial factor to answering more questions in this vertical.

Currently none of the major players in the travel market have created an action for Google, but Virgin Holidays, SkyScanner, Ryanair and EasyJet have created ‘skills’ for Alexa.

Flight search

The sample set of travel industry key phrases prompted 11 flight search responses. With multiple airlines including major holiday providers, Jet2, EasyJet, TUI, British Airways and more, as well as automated price tracking and alerts – Google Flights is steadily becoming the first and potentially only way to search for flights.

How this works as a voice response:

User – “Ok Google, flights to Italy”

Google Assistant – “Some popular flight destinations in Italy include Rome and Milan. Upcoming roundtrip flights from London start at £167.00. Where are you looking to go?”

On the web this looks like:

Flights from London to Italy		Sponsored
Rome Non-stop · 2h 30m+	from £116	
Milan Non-stop · 1h 55m+	from £117	
Venice Non-stop · 2h 10m+	from £112	
Naples 1 stop · 4h 5m+	from £141	
Florence 1 stop · 3h 40m+	from £167	
More destinations		

Clicking a result takes you to Google’s newly designed Google Flights site, where anybody is able to compare flights to almost any destination, as well as set up price tracking, so you’ll be alerted if prices for your flights drop. The future of this tool will not only look at flights, but also hotels and package trip deals.

On the assistant if you carried on the conversation;

User – “Ok Google, flights to Italy”

Google Assistant – “Some popular flight destinations in Italy include Rome and Milan. Upcoming roundtrip flights from London start at £167.00. Where are you looking to go?”

User – “Milan”

Google Assistant – “Upcoming roundtrip flights from London to Milan start at £34.00. Do you know what dates you’d like to fly?”

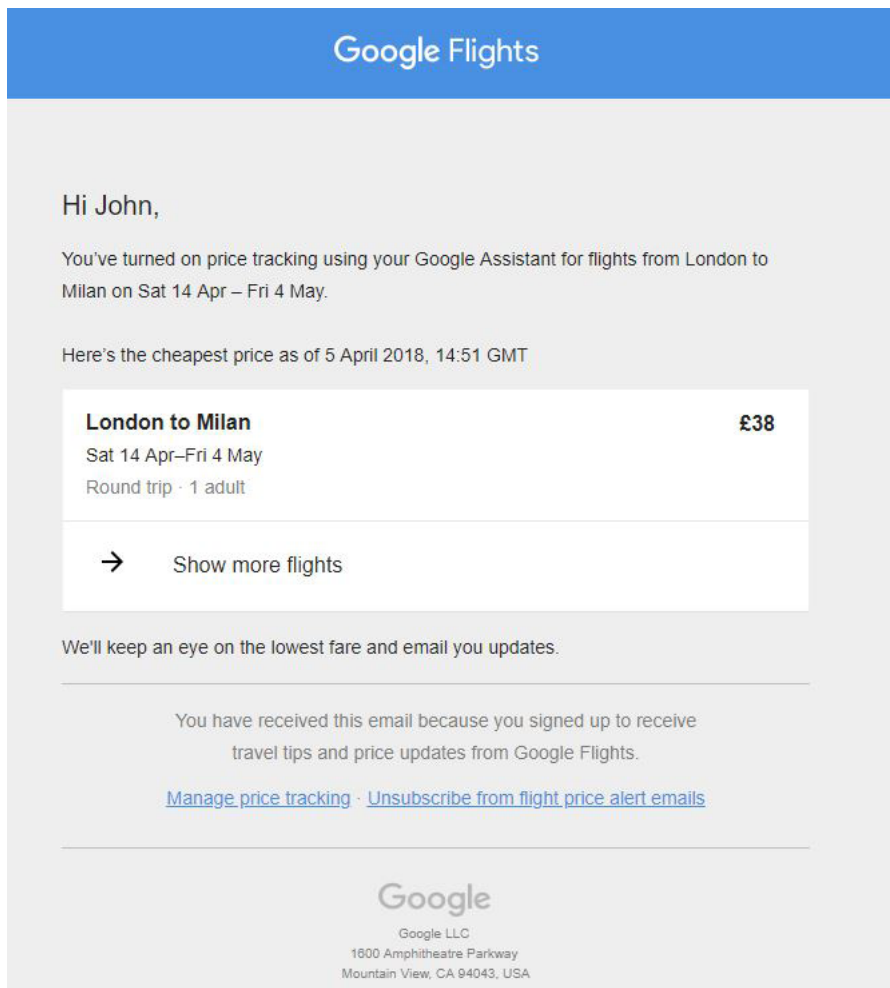
User – “14th April to the 4th of May”

Google Assistant – “Roundtrip flights from London to Milan leaving 14 Apr and coming back 4 May start at £38.00. Should I email you if that price changes?”

User – “Yes”

Google Assistant – “You got it”

Once completed you receive an email with the notification that price tracking is turned on and a link to book the flight.



The image shows a screenshot of an email notification from Google Flights. The email has a blue header with the text "Google Flights". The main content is on a light gray background. It starts with a greeting "Hi John," followed by a message: "You've turned on price tracking using your Google Assistant for flights from London to Milan on Sat 14 Apr – Fri 4 May." Below this, it says "Here's the cheapest price as of 5 April 2018, 14:51 GMT". A white box contains the flight details: "London to Milan" with the price "£38", "Sat 14 Apr–Fri 4 May", and "Round trip · 1 adult". Below the box is a button with a right arrow and the text "Show more flights". Underneath, it says "We'll keep an eye on the lowest fare and email you updates." A horizontal line separates this from a paragraph: "You have received this email because you signed up to receive travel tips and price updates from Google Flights." Below that are two links: "[Manage price tracking](#) - [Unsubscribe from flight price alert emails](#)". At the bottom, the Google logo is displayed, followed by the text "Google LLC", "1600 Amphitheatre Parkway", and "Mountain View, CA 94043, USA".

Google Flights

Hi John,

You've turned on price tracking using your Google Assistant for flights from London to Milan on Sat 14 Apr – Fri 4 May.

Here's the cheapest price as of 5 April 2018, 14:51 GMT

London to Milan **£38**
Sat 14 Apr–Fri 4 May
Round trip · 1 adult

→ Show more flights

We'll keep an eye on the lowest fare and email you updates.

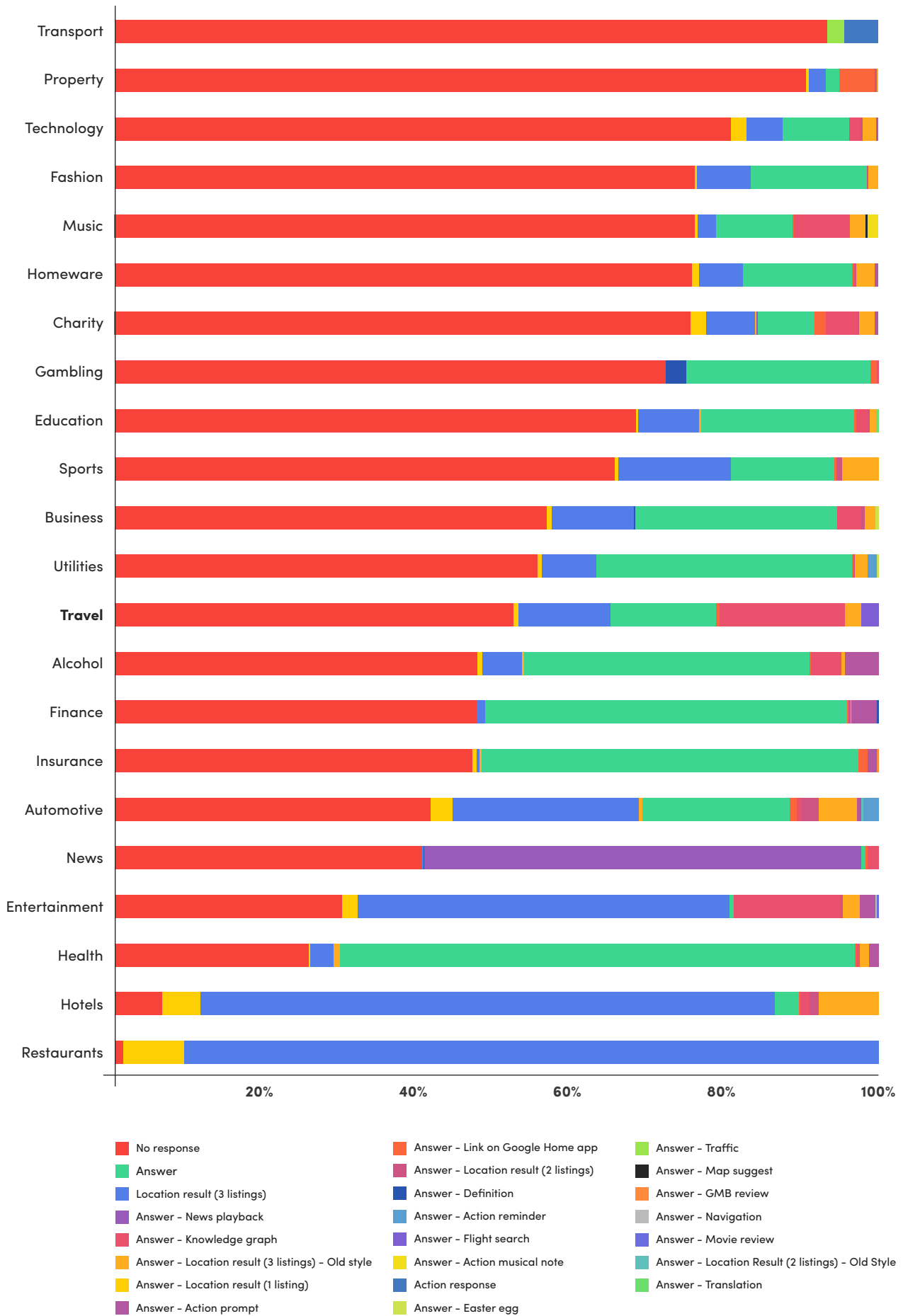
You have received this email because you signed up to receive travel tips and price updates from Google Flights.

[Manage price tracking](#) - [Unsubscribe from flight price alert emails](#)

Google
Google LLC
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043, USA



Vertical Comparison



A network diagram consisting of several nodes (small circles) connected by thin lines, forming a complex web. The nodes are scattered across the upper and middle portions of the page. The background is a solid yellow color.

Next Steps



Future reports

This report will be run quarterly and the updated data will allow us to track how Google's voice responses change over time, for example, whether we start to see more responses or new types of responses appearing for all or particular verticals.

Suggested next steps

- Gain as many answer boxes as possible
- GAP analysis for the key phrases with no answer box / assistant result
- Creation of an action for the Google assistant to try to gain action prompt results

Want to learn more?

If anything in this document has interested you, you can talk to ROAST about the following;

- Voice Search Strategy
- Ongoing Voice Search Ranking Reports - Bigger key phrases sets, increased frequency, customised tracking
- Website optimisation to gain more answer boxes and thus better voice search results
- Production of Actions for Google and Skills for Alexa devices

Just pop an email to voicesearch@tipigroup.com or give us a call on 0208 102 8500.


Get your own Voice Search Ranking Report

If you are interested in voice search, we can create a one-off Voice Search Ranking Report for you.

You can complete the form on weareroast.com/white-papers/voice-search or email us at voiceresearch@tipigroup.com with your name, the domain you wish to track, and a sample set of key phrases (if you don't have a list, send generic key phrases and we'll create a list of related key phrases).

Please Note

Our voice search reports are not fully automated currently. You will be contacted by the ROAST team to confirm the creation of a report.



For any further questions,
you can email us at
sayhello@tipigroup.com

weareroast.com

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