Report – April 2023

In how many clicks will you buy a ticket to Berlin?

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7th report of our “Counting clicks” series

This time we invite you to a journey through selected websites of carriers (bus, railway and air), allowing for ticket purchase.

We analyze their interface usability from the perspective of speed and convenience of use. Fasten your seatbelts and see from which European cities and on which website you can buy a ticket to Berlin the fastest.

EDISONDA by Grant Thornton

What does the report contain?

6 reports have already been published as a part of the “Counting clicks” series

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1. How quickly will you apply for a job in Europe?
2. How quickly will you issue an invoice?
3. How quickly will you order a courier shipment?
4. How fast will you set up a brokerage account?
5. How fast will you buy insurance online?
6. How fast will you sign up for a doctor’s appointment online?

We invite you to take a look at their content! →

Why do we count clicks?

It is not true that every function in a digital system should be within a maximum of three clicks. Other criteria such as the popularity of a function, the context of the recipient, their role, goals to achieve, and the construction of the entire information architecture are much more important.

So why do we count clicks?

The role of reports from the "Counting clicks" series is to initiate a discussion about the usability of the interface, and the number of clicks is easy to understand, objective, and convincing.

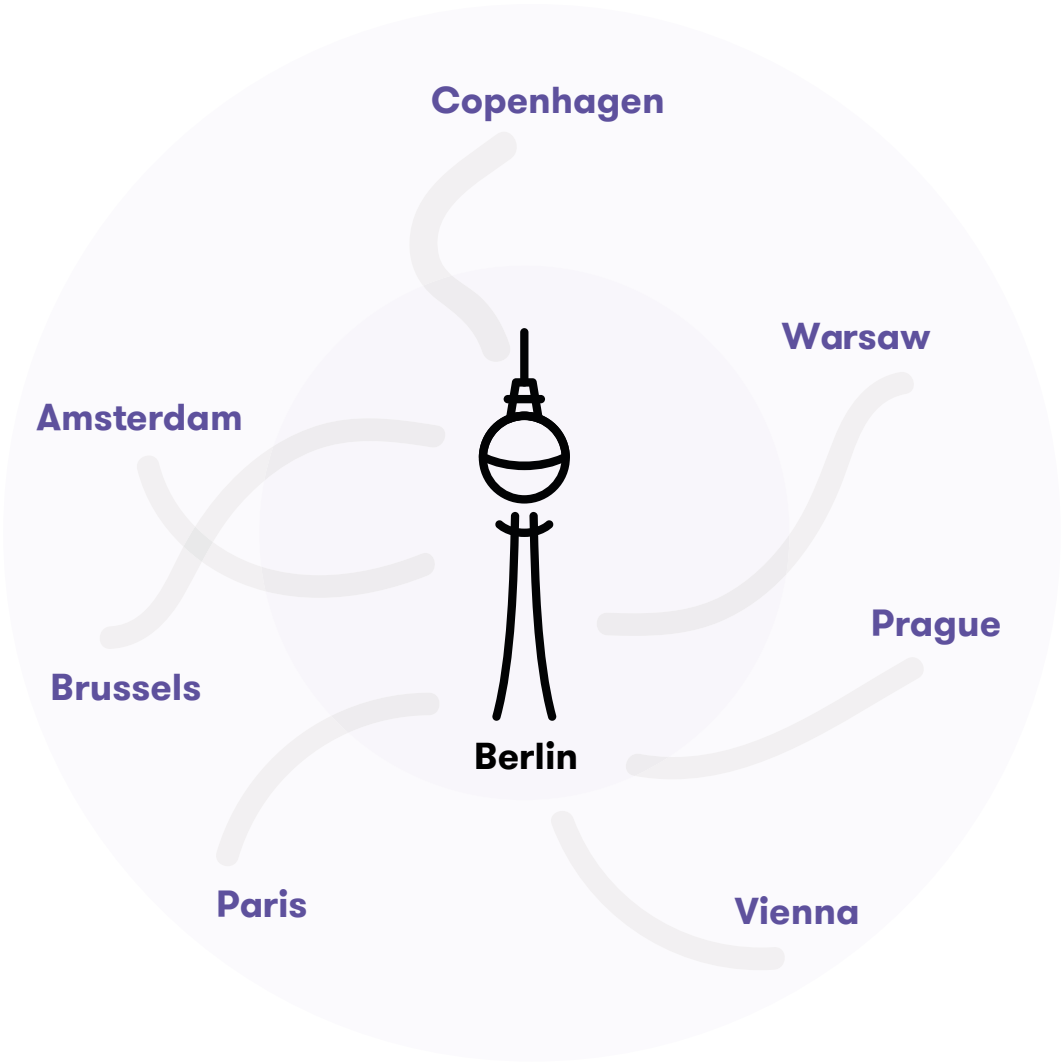
We believe that this is a good initial measure of interface efficiency, providing interesting benchmarking material for more advanced research and analysis in the area around Customer and User Experience.

Research methodology – what did we study?

We conducted the study in April 2023.
The test covered **the path of purchasing a ticket for a trip to Berlin from selected European cities.**

We assumed freedom in the traveller's choice of means of transport by analysing **the purchase of tickets for a plane, train, and bus.**

We examined the shortest user path from starting the search on the carrier's website to buying the ticket. The minimum number of clicks includes buying a one-way ticket for one adult without any additional personalization.



Journey winners

Meet the carriers offering the shortest journey through their website interface (measured by the clicks to purchase a ticket).

These are companies offering the shortest overall ticket purchase experience (including ticket search, passenger data form, customization, and payment) in three categories: train, bus, and airplane travel.

NS International

FlixBus

PLL LOT

Journey winners

NS International 14 clicks

Despite slightly longer payment process than other carriers, NS owes its victory to very fast search engine and a convenient data form. In addition, a big plus for a pleasant, integrated UI visual layer.

FlixBus 17 clicks

Integrating the data form and payment fields on a single page (without the need to click between pages) is the key to Flixbus' victory. In addition, the very fast payment process (even with just one click) and convenient search engine contribute to a positive traveler experience.

PLL LOT 21 clicks

A fast search engine with convenient default options, a short passenger data form, and quick payment. The airline wins because it takes good care of every stage of the customer's journey.

Stops on the user's journey

Online ticket purchasing services have a lot in common with online stores (the purchasing process consists of similar stages). Taking into account the specificity of the product, which is an online airline ticket, we divided the online journey into 4 stops, distinguishing: searching and selecting the connection, necessary passenger information, possible additional options, and the payment process (which is also present in a similar form in the standard e-commerce process).

Stops on the user's journey

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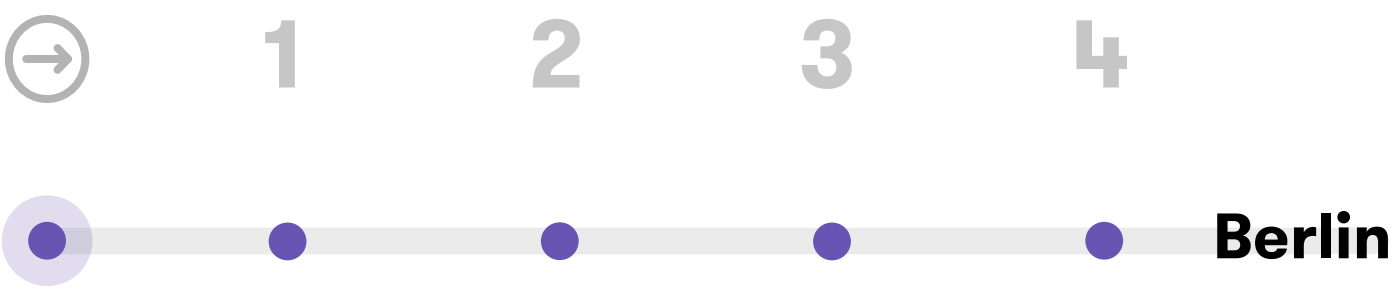
1. Connection search – the stage of searching for the appropriate connection by the user. It includes selecting the starting and final city, travel date, and choosing the preferred connection from the search results list.

2. Data form – after selecting the best connection, the passenger moves to the next step where they fill out the required data by the carrier.

3. Ticket personalization – in addition to the information required to purchase a ticket, the passenger has the option to customize their ticket based on individual preferences. Such conveniences include reserving a seat, purchasing additional baggage, or insurance.

4. Pyment for the ticket – the last stage of the purchase journey is making the payment. The user has the option to choose the fastest and most convenient method for them, among those supported by the carrier. This could be payment by card or Google or Apple Pay, for example.



In how many clicks will you buy a ticket to Berlin?

Connection search
– stage 1

Stage 1

Connection search

Fast and easy search for connections is crucial for building a positive first impression of using the service. Ticket services use similar solutions in this regard. However, those that stand out focus primarily on:

Grouping functions within the search engine

Division into basic and advanced search engines

Suggestions for search options and filters, such as sorting by travel duration

Clear visualization of search results

Stage winners:

NS International

5 clicks

Ecolines

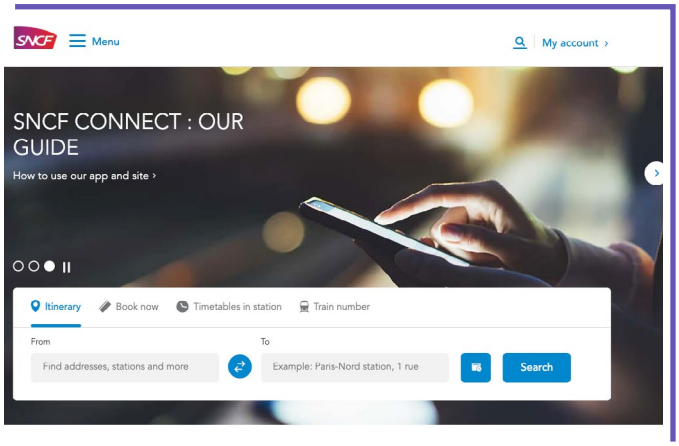
5 clicks

Brussels Airlines
PLL Lot

6 clicks

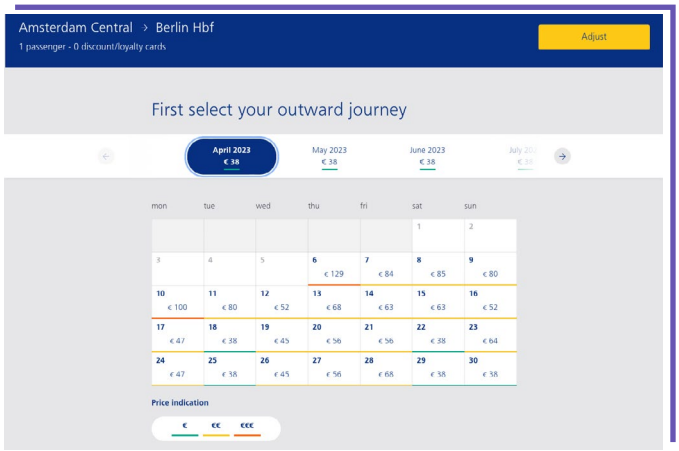
Stage 1

Connection search good practices



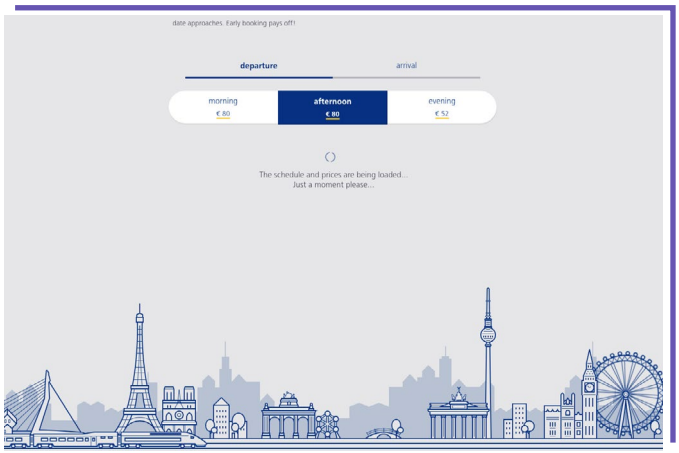
Grouped search elements

The range of ticket search options can include many possibilities (such as travel destinations, one-way or round-trip tickets). Some carriers use step-by-step search fields, so that the user is not burdened with making all decisions at once.



Price visualization to speed up the decision-making process

The price of a ticket is often a key factor in the decision-making process. Clear graphical representation of this element can significantly speed up the ticket purchase process, allowing the user to avoid unnecessary clicks to check ticket details.



Graphics that “entertain” during the search results wait time

The waiting time for available connection results usually takes a few seconds. It is worth engaging the user during this time, for example by showing contextual graphics (such as a photo of the travel destination) or an interesting animation.

In how many clicks will you buy a ticket to Berlin?

Data form
– stage 2

Stage 2

Data form

An essential stop for every “ticketing” website. Despite universal UX rules governing the design of forms, this element is quite demanding when purchasing a ticket.

Data forms are a permanent element of many shopping websites. The structure and layout of this interface element depend primarily on the scope of the necessary data.

In the case of ticketing services, passenger data can be saved for future purchases. In addition, the best forms include:

Automatic formatting of entered data

Automatic data pulling from the form

Visual elements of the form

Stage winners:

ÖBB Intercity
České dráhy

6 clicks

FlixBus

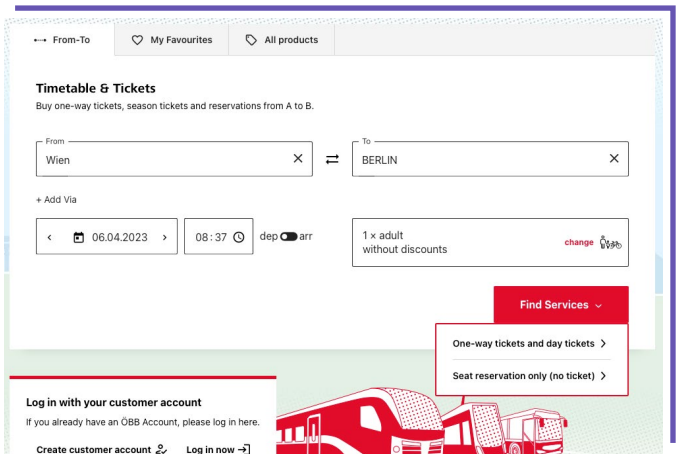
7 clicks

PLL Lot

12 clicks

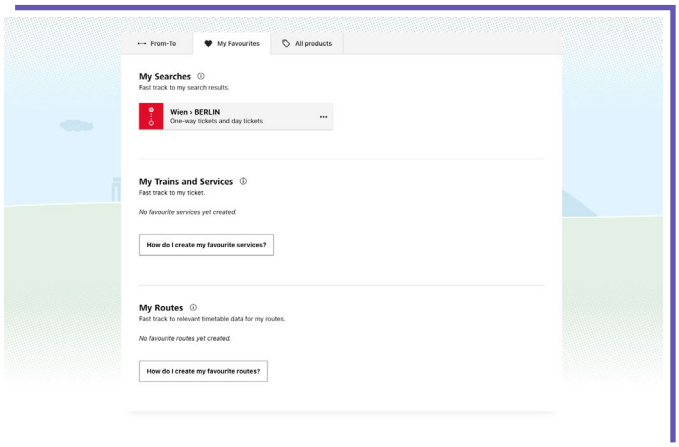
Stage 2

Data form good practices



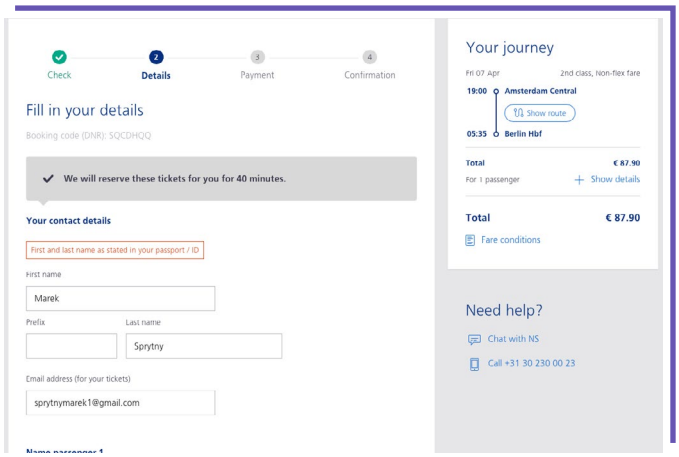
Contextual information about the possibility of creating an account

Information about the possibility of creating an account does not have to be available only on the first page of the website. Contextual reminders to the user about this possibility will facilitate future purchases.



Saving favorite routes

The ability to save favorite routes speeds up the ticket purchase process for customers who often travel in one direction.



Automatic formatting and pulling data from forms

Not only suggestion lists for filling in data (such as specific stations), but also automatic formatting of manually entered data speeds up the ticket purchase process. Similarly, automatic data pulling between purchase stages plays a similar role.

In how many clicks will you buy a ticket to Berlin?

Ticket personalization
– stage 3

Berlin

Stage 3

Ticket personalization

—

Depending on the type of carrier (airplane, train, bus), customers can be offered different options for personalizing their travel, such as seat selection, additional baggage options, travel insurance, and even the type of meal served. Here are a few good practices for presenting such content that doesn't overwhelm the user with too many additional options:

Graphics resembling the actual arrangement of seats in the plane or train.

Precise descriptions of luggage dimensions with baggage graphics.

Service options displayed only in the context of previously selected data.

Stage winners:

SBB-CFF-FFS

9 clicks

RegioJet

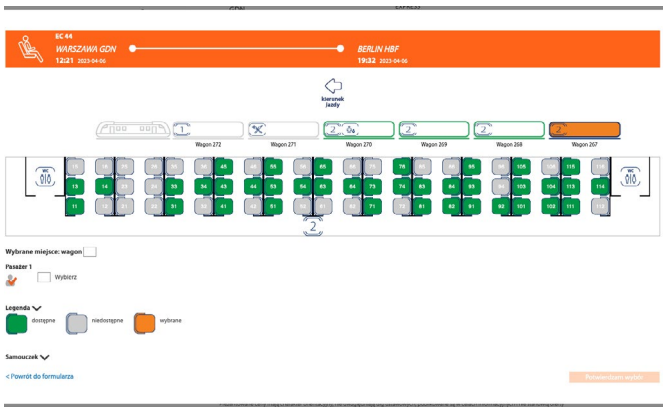
4 clicks

SAS – Scandinavian Airlines

11 clicks

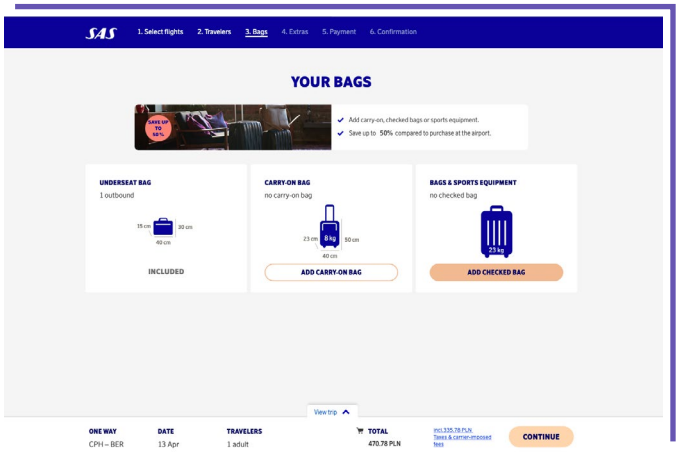
Stage 3

Ticket personalization good practices



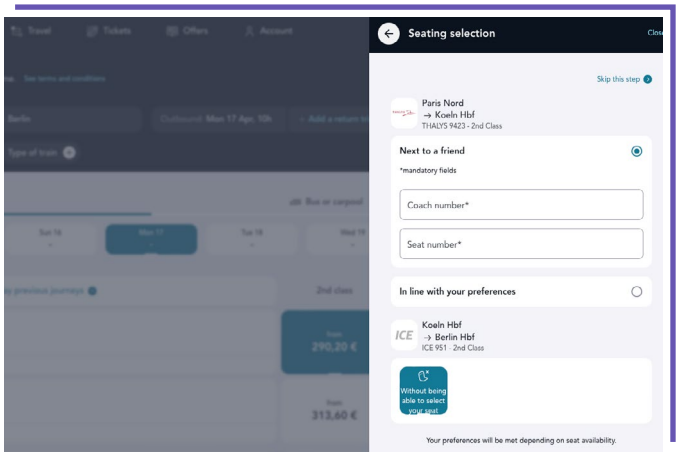
Seat selection

The more realistic the graphic showing seat selection, the greater the user's comfort in making their choice. Proper labeling of occupied and available seats (as well as their prices) is crucial in this element.



Luggage selection

The price of airline tickets often depends on the number and size of luggage. Clear labeling (visualization) of the types of luggage to choose from influences faster decision-making by the user.



Options for combining tickets and easy data editing

An interesting example of ticket personalization is the possibility of combining them with other tickets (e.g. choosing a seat next to a friend). Key to all additional options is the ability to easily edit them and possibly cancel the previously selected ones.

In how many clicks will you buy a ticket to Berlin?

Payment for the ticket
– stage 4

Berlin

Stage 4

Payment for the ticket

The final stage of the purchasing journey, which is the payment, usually does not cause any problems for users thanks to the use of well-known solutions from e-commerce services. Many ticketing services use similar solutions, such as showing the stages of the purchase process.

Additionally, among interesting solutions, we can point out:

A visible shopping cart at every stage of the selection process

Quick payments, e.g. available on one page with passenger data.

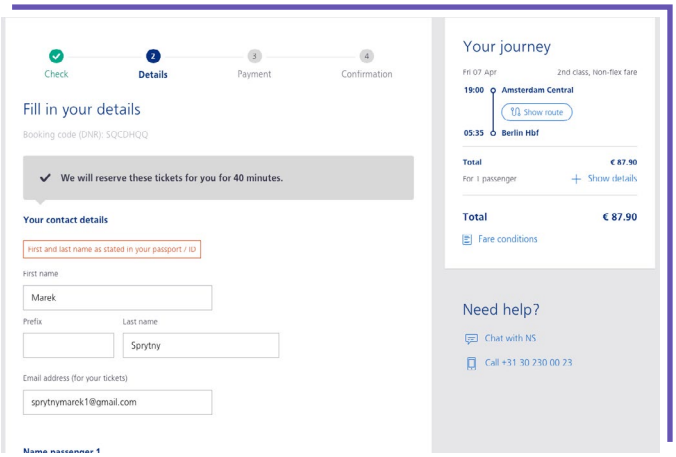
Clear purchase summary pages, e.g. grouping main and additional options.

Stage winners:

PKP Intercity	**1 click** ●
FlixBus	**1 click** ●
Air France **KLM**	**2 clicks** ● ●

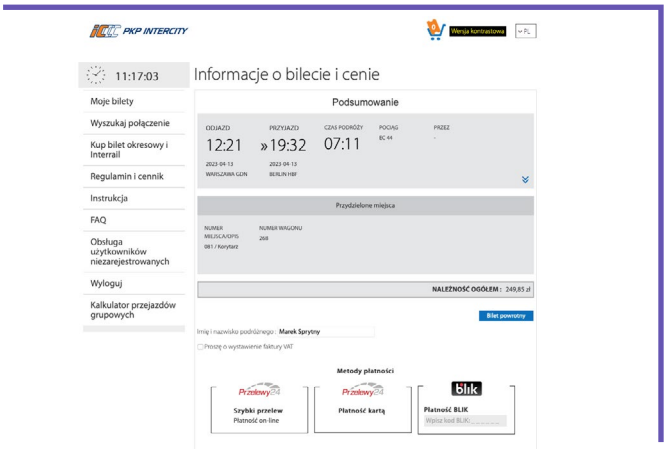
Stage 4

Payment for the ticket good practices



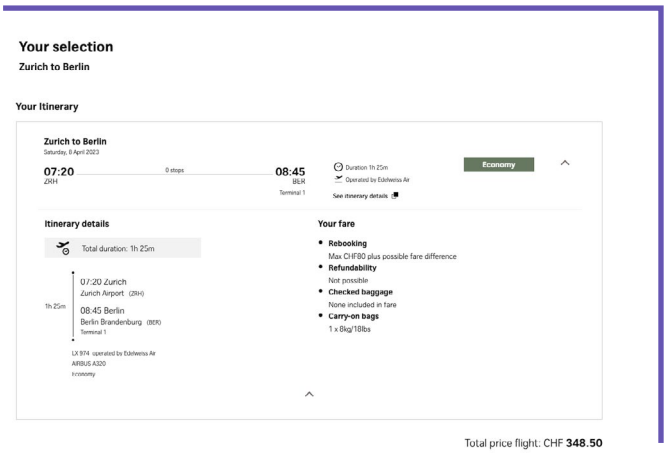
Visible purchase path

A visible shopping cart allows travelers to control the cost of purchasing a ticket (they won't be surprised by the cost at the end).



Convenient payment methods

Many carriers integrate their services with national payment operators. They offer very convenient solutions for quick payments, such as BLIK (the ability to enter the code directly on the website).



Payment summary

By specifying the components of the ticket, the traveler can be sure of the correct ticket selection. It is worth giving the possibility to modify data on such pages in case of necessary changes.

Summary – average number of clicks by stops

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Stop 1
Connection search:

Train	8
Bus	6
Airplane	8

Stop 3
Ticket personalization:

Train	15
Bus	6
Airplane	19

Stop 2
Data form:

Train	8
Bus	9
Airplane	12

Stop 4:
Payment for the ticket:

Train	3
Bus	3
Airplane	3

In how many clicks will you buy a ticket to Berlin?

Ranking means
of transportation

Ranking – purchase of an airplane ticket

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Average number of clicks: 27

Warsaw	PLL LOT	21 clicks
Copenhagen	SAS – Scandinavian Airlines	24
Amsterdam	KLM	27
Brussels	Brussels Airlines	28
Paris	Air France	28
Vienna	Austrian Airlines	29
Zurich	Swiss	32

Ranking – purchase of a train ticket

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Average number of clicks: 21

Amsterdam	NS International	17 clicks
Prague	České dráhy	18
Brussels	SNBC International	20
Zurich	SBB-CFF-FFS	20
Vienna	ÖBB Intercity	21
Warsaw	PKP Intercity	23
Paris	SNCF	23
Copenhagen	DSB	24

Ranking – purchase of a bus ticket

Average number of clicks: 18

Warsaw	FlixBus	14 clicks
Paris	FlixBus	14 clicks
Amsterdam	RegioJet	21
Brussels	RegioJet	21
Copenhagen	BerlinExpressen	21

Research methodology

1.
The research was conducted in April 2023. We tested the ticket purchase path for a trip to Berlin from selected European cities.

2.
We allowed the traveler to choose any means of transportation, analyzing the purchase of tickets for flights, trains, and buses.

3.
We examined the shortest user path from the start of the search on the carrier's website to the ticket purchase. The minimum number of clicks includes purchasing a one-way ticket for one adult without additional personalization.

4.
We are aware that there are many more companies providing air, rail, and bus transportation in Europe than those indicated in the report.

5.
The analysis conducted is indicative of the functioning of ticketing services based on selected test samples.

6.
By choosing Berlin as the destination, centrally located in Western Europe, we limited the selected companies to those in countries neighboring Germany (we collected representations of companies whose travel origin was in the home country).

7.
We adopted the path of a typical user searching for tickets on the internet. Therefore, it was significant for the selection of companies which ones appeared most frequently and highest in the search results after entering the travel destination from a particular country (e.g., Google Flight or connection-aggregating services).

In how many clicks will you buy a ticket to Berlin?

Experts comments

EDISONDA by Grant Thornton

According to our expert

Hubert Turaj
Managing Partner

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The transportation industry, and the tourism industry more broadly, are extremely demanding in terms of digitizing their services – he multitude of combinations and directions, discounts, dynamic prices, and schedule changes do not make life easier for digital platform providers. It is therefore pleasing that the online tools we use as passengers and tourists to buy tickets for our travels are becoming increasingly useful. However, it is worth noticing that **transportation companies such as airlines, railways, and buses face many other challenges when it comes to digitization and optimizing their business**, such as internal logistics processes, fleet management, and advanced navigation systems. Interestingly, there are also **more and more examples of interesting start-ups trying to change the rules of the game, which is important also in the public sector** (for example, the Polish start-up SP Tech Solutions developing software referred to as "Uber for railways"). **As passengers, we will also increasingly encounter solutions that combine the online and offline worlds.**QR codes accompanying us at every stage of the journey, automatic check-ins, airport package terminals, and autonomous assisting robots are examples of existing digital services we can use. **Is the transportation industry ready to implement further innovations?** Based on the observation of a narrow slice of digital travel reality, such as ticketing services, it seems that it is more than ready. The train with innovations is just starting to gain speed.

According to our expert

Piotr Modrzewski
Senior Business Designer

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The interfaces of travel services are offering increasingly better UX experiences. Regardless of the country or type of carrier analyzed, customers will find many useful and convenient tools that make purchasing tickets and planning trips easier. In this industry, similar to e-commerce, **there is also a clear trend towards developing dedicated mobile applications that provide greater possibilities for personalizing experiences** (such as calendar integrations, quick payments, and ticket previews).

Looking into the future, **the evolution of current service interfaces towards conversational interfaces is very promising** for the tourism industry. Generative artificial intelligence can also disrupt this area significantly. For example, the Expedia service has already integrated the popular ChatGPT with its mobile application (users can ask it to plan their trips, among other things).

Will the future bring personal AI-guided tour guides? This can significantly change our approach to planning our trips. Soon, wanting to buy a ticket to Berlin may be as simple as entering the appropriate command in the chat window, and the AI will take care of the rest. It may not only purchase the ticket but also advise on whether it's the right time to travel or even plan the entire trip program.

According to our expert

Joanna Pałubicka
UX Researcher

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The market also offers search engines that integrate offers from many carriers within one or several means of transportation. This allows the user to **compare and choose the most advantageous connection**, both in terms of price and travel time, which is an advantage over carrier portals.

An additional feature that distinguishes the interfaces of these search engines is **the ability to see the travel route on a map** alongside search results. Such integrators often also **offer options for car or hotel reservations** in the same timeframe as the search query.
However, it is worth noting that **the search, filtering, and connection selection processes themselves do not differ** from those on the individual carrier websites, and some of the additional options, such as car rentals, are also already available on those sites. Therefore, **their convenience is increasingly similar to that of integrating search engines.**
In addition, **usability of this type of integrator depends largely on the number of cooperating companies and the quality of the data sources** used by the search engine, as well as **the ability to complete the reservation on the same page,** without redirecting the user to the carrier's website, which prolongs and complicates the ticket purchase process.

In how many clicks will you buy a ticket to Berlin?

About us

EDISONDA by Grant Thornton

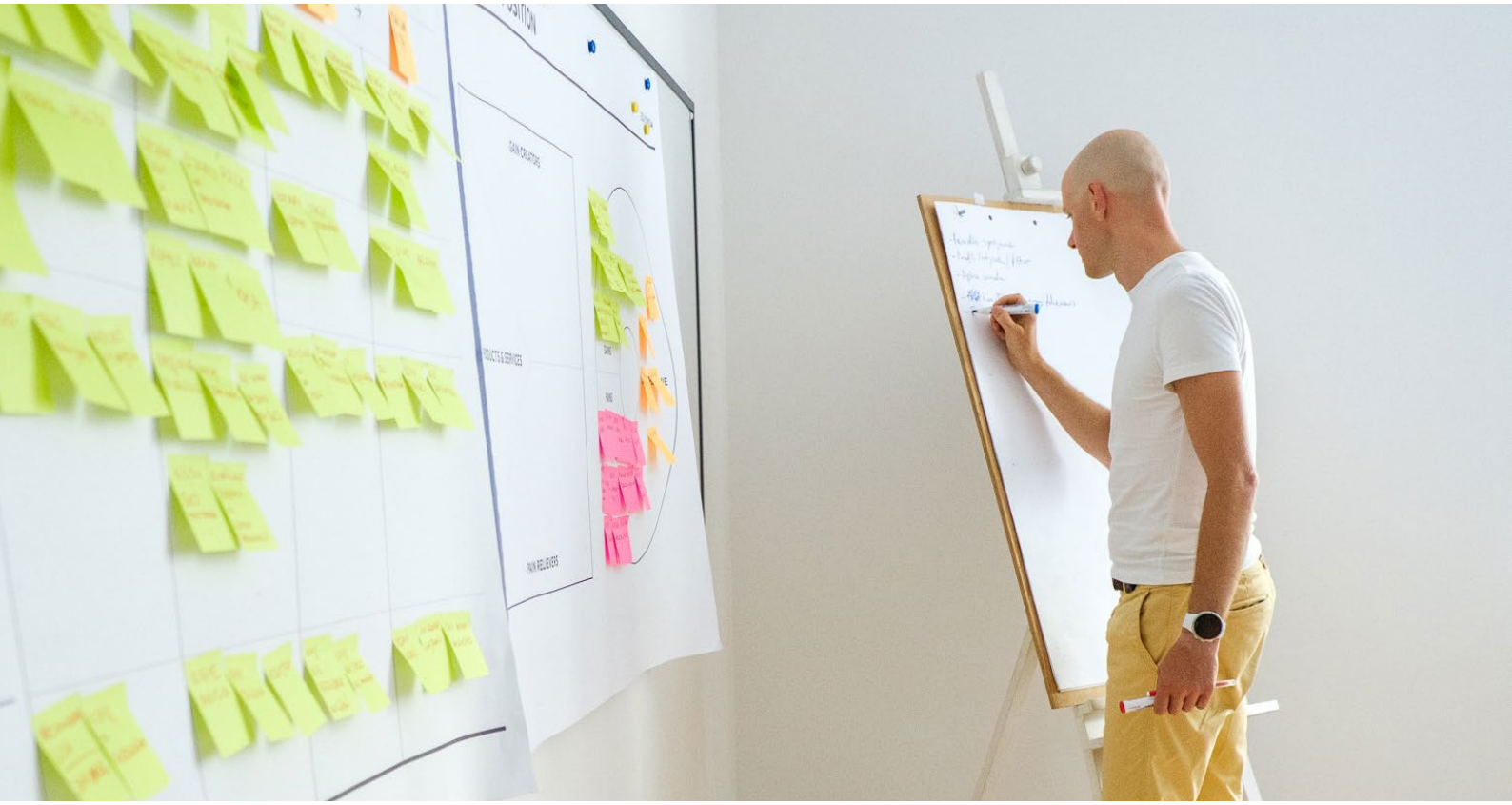
Business design experts

EDISONDA is a team of experienced Business Design practitioners specializing in research, design, optimization, and implementation of digital products.

We create systems and innovations that increase business efficiency.

We help companies implement digital change to become stronger, more efficient, and offer their products to customers in an intuitive and useful way. We focus on long-term collaborations to better understand the organization's context and effectively support the business.

We carry out unique and challenging projects in large companies, corporations, as well as interesting, groundbreaking projects for smaller businesses. As experts, based on our knowledge and tools and processes developed over the years, we are eager to help redesign current solutions or refine innovative ideas so that our clients can achieve success.



We come from Poland but operate globally

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We have **the stability of a large organization and the agility of a design and research studio.** We have completed **over 900 projects** on (almost) every continent.

We are a part of **Grant Thornton – a worldwide consulting and auditing company – that has been operating in Poland since 1993 and employs over 700 people here.**

While we are an independent unit, we have access to the support and knowledge of over 56,000 Grant Thornton employees worldwide on a daily basis. We create modern digital tools for them.

EDISONDA is people

Since 2009, we have been **building our team** gradually. Currently, there are **over 50 experienced specialists from various fields working at EDISONDA.**

Our team consists of product, visual, and business designers, CX researchers, analysts, and frontend developers. Each project team is supported by project managers.

The core of our team consists of experts with over 10 years of experience and consultants with 5 years of experience in the field of digital product research and design.

We improve the effectiveness of companies in key areas

Digitalisation and processes strategy

We identify development potential, recommend directions, and develop a strategy.

Digital innovations and products

We research digital tools, develop their functionality, and improve usability.

Process optimization

We support conceptualization, MVP creation, and prototype testing.

B2B and B2C sales

We optimize checkout, increase conversion, redesign, and increase loyalty.

Digital customer service

We design user-friendly and intuitive self-service applications and systems, as well as eBOK.

HR process support

We specialize in intranets, employee portals, business system projects, and back office support.

Need some support in the development of your digital products? Let’s talk!

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In the report we used materials from
https://www.pexels.com
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