

# Cheapflights in a time of travel bans, Brexit and savvy consumers

 By [Cari Coetzee](#)

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In a career spanning 20 years, award-winning commercial marketer, Andrew Shelton, has worked for some of the most high-profile brands in travel, including Virgin Holidays. Shelton joined Cheapflights in 2014 as marketing director and in 2015 was appointed managing director. We had a chat with Shelton to find out what's in store for the Cheapflights brand in 2017.



Andrew Shelton

## ■ ***What can we look forward to from the Cheapflights brand this year?***

A continued focus on 'smart search made simple' and the preservation of our position as the number one flight metasearch brand in South Africa. It's one of our fastest growing markets and we see considerable potential for further growth. During last year, we scored some great success through content marketing, PR, partnerships and influencer communications so expect to see more of the same in 2017.

## ■ ***What's on your wish-list for brand objectives for 2017?***

Like any brand, we want to be growing our unprompted awareness, and also our direct traffic as that is by far better value for us. We also want to build more partnerships both with the wider travel industry - both in terms of helping to attract inbound tourism to South Africa, and helping South Africans to see the world themselves - through our newsletter and metasearch propositions, and more widely through brand collaborations.

## ■ ***What impact are global issues like Brexit and Trump's travel ban having on Cheapflights and other travel brands?***

The general trend is for these large, geopolitical events to have noticeable, but short-lived, impacts as consumers respond to what they're seeing in the news and begin to consider different travel options. Brexit, for example, drove a 40% swing from UK Cheapflights users searching for flights to Europe to destinations like South Africa and the Caribbean.

That trend plateaued and returned to normal within around three months, though, so tourism authorities and brands in emerging markets should be looking to take advantage of the commercial opportunities that present themselves by working with a nimble data-driven brand like ourselves, to put targeted communications into market quickly, across a range of

platforms and channels.

■ ***What are some of the other major challenges influencing brand decisions for Cheapflights currently?***

We may be the largest flight metasearch brand in South Africa, but we're always aware of how competitive the market is, and must always avoid complacency. Users today are generally very savvy, and so getting and retaining their loyalty is a constant effort requiring creativity in our execution, accuracy in our targeting and integration across our channels. It can be a tricky juggling act – especially when, as a marketer, my primary concern is with ROI.

■ ***And what are some of the other major opportunities influencing brand decisions for Cheapflights?***

It was recently announced that we are being acquired by US metasearch brand, KAYAK, subject to regularity approval, so we're looking forward to seeing how our individual strengths can be combined in the future.

■ ***Is brand collaboration in your brand tool box and, if so, how important a tool is it for Cheapflights?***

Yes, it is, and we're always open to hearing how we could work with another brand if there is synergy between our values and objectives. At the end of the day, we'll always ask 'how will this benefit our users?', and if the answer is clear then a meaningful collaboration will always be a possibility.

■ ***What do you love most about the South African consumer and how they interact with the Cheapflights brand?***

The difficulties that the rand has faced over recent years has meant South Africans have had to be really cost-conscious in their travel plans, which has played extremely well to our core purpose. Triple-digit growth rates across our mobile, app and desktop products show that they've really embraced the simple utility of our purpose and are attracted to the practicality, speed and intuitive nature of our interface. Metasearch is still relatively young in South Africa, so it's great to see how consumers have embraced it, particularly on mobile.

## ABOUT CARI COETZEE

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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