



Episode 220 – Dan Flores

Intro: This is brand USA talks travel, elevating the conversation about international travel to the United States. Here's your host, Mark Lapidus.

Mark Lapidus [0:09]: What are your favorite AI tools?

Dan Flores [0:12]: Man, there's so many. That list changes probably twice a month right now. HeyGen, which is a translation tool that you can do video to really, any language or can actually put you in any destination.

Mark Lapidus [0:28]: Oh, I saw that when a friend of mine was speaking to me in Japanese. It even mashed his mouth.

Dan Flores [0:32]: Yeah, they actually, they lip sync everything up so you can do a presentation and send it to wherever you want to. Mid journey has been kind of a long time favorite for creating images, videos, something that we use. Notebook LM, which is really interesting. You can actually put a document down and it'll do a podcast for you on the notes and summaries.

Mark Lapidus [0:56]: I'm not sure I like that one. Let's not talk about that one.

Dan Flores [0:59]: Text that one out. But it's really cool technology. You can actually, if you have like a, I don't know, let's say you're going over a destination report with tons of like, data that you want summarized. You can just feed it into there and it'll write you like a cliff notes of what's important. Or it will read it to you in like podcast fashion. And OpenAI just launched out previewing zero one, which is, I mean, it's next level. When you're looking at how LLMs go after complexity math problems, complex theories, it's pretty impressive, but it's still very early. It's been out for, I think, a week.

Mark Lapidus [1:36]: So one of the things I want to do is actually translate television shows using multiple characters. And I haven't seen anything yet that'll do that. It'll do one voice, but it won't do a whole bunch of different characters. Have you seen any?

Dan Flores [1:47]: I haven't, but it doesn't mean that it's not out there. I saw a stat the other day that it was every month there's around 14,000 new AI companies filing for licenses. So if it's not, if they don't have it right now, it's probably in the near future.

Mark Lapidus [2:04]: I'm sure it will be. I am so glad to be joined by Dan Flores, head of tourism at Satisfied Labs. Dan also sits on US Travel Association's board of directors and the National Advisory

Council for the National Blacks and Travel and Tourism Collaborative. Plus, if that isn't enough, Dan is also the co chair of the development committee, Tourism Cares. Welcome to Brand USA talks Travel. Dan.

Dan Flores [2:26]: Hey, thanks for having me mark that sounds like a mouthful, stepping away from a couple of those at this point.

Mark Lapidus [2:36]: It's funny to hear someone else say it, isn't it? Even when you're doing it all yourself.

Dan Flores [2:41]: It's like, why would I sign up for that many things? It leans more towards. I love the tourism industry. I've been in it for a little over 20 years now, and I've been given the ability or invited to sit on some of these honored councils and advisory boards. And what it does for me is it just, you just learn so much from the other people that are on it. It's been incredible.

Mark Lapidus [3:07]: It's so great to meet so many people as well. A lot of smart people in this industry. Tell us about your company, Dan. Tell us about satisfy Labs.

Dan Flores [3:15]: Satisfy Labs is a conversational AI experience platform. So what that means is we sit strictly in the chat area of things. We stick to hospitality verticals. So we started in professional sports, live entertainment and tourism. The one thing that I think separates us is this is what we do. We do chat platforms for hospitality driven businesses. We're very good at what we do. Right now we have a little over 600 clients between the three verticals. And at the end of the day, what the. Whether you're a fan going to see a professional baseball game, a theater buff going to check out a Broadway show, or a visitor going to one of our wonderful destinations here in the US, you have questions about the experience that you're going to do, and we give a frictionless, digital way to get the responses, and then we can actually drive them to outcomes that the companies themselves are looking for.

Mark Lapidus [4:14]: If I can hear you over your lawnmower guy, could you please give us a few examples of companies you work with and what you do for them?

Dan Flores [4:24]: Yeah, absolutely. In the sports area we started with, our first client was the New York Mets. We actually work with Major League Baseball as a whole, too. So anytime that you're engaging with the chat platform from one of the teams or the league that itself, it's us. That can be a ticketing question. That could be a question that you're in the ballpark. Some of the stadiums actually use our platform to find the nearest food and beverage concession stand near where you're sitting. You can order it directly from your seat and in some places have it delivered to you all in a digital and frictionless way. If you go on the show wicked on Broadway, we are the ticket concierge that you see on their website. On the tourism space, we work with the greater Raleigh CVB so if you go on their website, anytime that you're chatting with them, that's actually our platform. And then we're a SaaS model, so you really won't know that it's satisfy labs. It'll feel very much like the end client having their brand tone, the way the information that they've built up in the knowledge volume. But you're actually dealing with us.

Mark Lapidus [5:29]: Got quite a list of big name investors. How long was that process and what did you learn from that experience? I'm sure you learned a lot.

Dan Flores [5:36]: We've learned a lot over the years. The Mets said yes, but major league baseball as a whole had to then go through the vetting process. And fortunate for us, once they did, they went, this is really cool technology. We'd like to be in business with you guys. Now, as that list kind of went on, most of the investors that you see on there started as clients and believed in the platform and what the vision of the company was so much that they decided to invest in us and put some of that money behind what we were looking to do. So it's, you know, what did we learn? Have a good product, do it really well, and people will believe in you and hopefully give you some of the money to keep going on that vision.

Mark Lapidus [6:22]: Obviously, the reason we're chatting today is specific to travel and tourism. So what do you find interesting in the travel and tourism industry? What are the problems you're trying to solve? What's your interaction with DMO's?

Dan Flores [6:32]: I mean, it's the industry I grew up in. I'm from Las Vegas, so tourism, I think is in our blood. But that's my background. I wasn't a sports or a technology person. I'm from the travel tourism industry to satisfy, brought me on to run the tourism vertical. Now, the problems that we have are similar to, I believe, what technology has had with travel and tourism from the, from the very beginning, it's a big industry, it's a fragmented industry where there's multiple parts within the travel and tourism side. You can work with hotels, you can work with destinations, activities, things to do, and each one is very different. Now, breaking down destinations as a whole, DMO's are really an interesting group because just because one destination is set up a certain way doesn't mean that any other destination operates the exact same. There's so many different funding models, there's so many different KPI's that they're looking for to be successful. It's not just bringing people into their city. It could be they're based on room tax, so they really need to push heads in beds and multiple nights in the city where some are stakeholders or members, you know, and that creates for us, it's actually a good thing because we give our platforms the flexibility and gives them control to then look at what outcomes they're looking to drive conversations to. So, yeah, it's kind of a problem as a whole from a technology side, but for us, it features some of the unique properties that we have within our platform.

Mark Lapidus [8:07]: I'm sure like most companies, Dan, you must start with some sort of discovery process.

Dan Flores [8:11]: Yeah, it's actually the most important part of getting this started. I think right now, AI has been such a hot topic in the industry that everyone just sees AI and they go, yeah, we'd like to talk to you about this. Actually. Don't know the problem that they're looking to solve. You know, in our discovery process, one of the first things that I say to a destination is like, what are the pain points that you have? What are the results that you're looking to get? And then let's build based on those, you know, if it is pushing our membership visitors to see and discover what we can do, then, okay, we're going to set up conversation flows to drive people to those results. You might say that it's. Yeah, we've got a really robust downtown, but it's almost, it's almost too crowded. We really love to push people out to these outer areas of the destination. Then what we're going to do is we're going to put together a flow that actually, as people ask some of the most popular areas, it gives them the answer they're looking for, then suggest that they see some of these similar things that might be in less trafficked areas. But knowing the pain points and why that you're looking at a platform like ours is the most important part. Because if you don't have for us, what happens is that the process just gets really long and it becomes a, well, can you do this? Can you do that? Can you do this? Okay, well, let's start with what you need to solve first. You know, are you looking to grab more visitor data to know more about what, you know, who's coming and what they're looking to do in your destination? Well, okay, we're gonna. We're gonna go down that route and we have a full analytics package within the platform that we can talk

about. So the suggestion on my side to anyone else is the discovery process is the most important. But when you're looking for a tool. You should at least have some of the pain points and some of the resolutions that you're looking for.

Mark Lapidus [9:58]: I saw a term that I didn't understand on your website. It says that you make AI hireable. What does that mean?

Dan Flores [10:05]: It's actually one of the original mission statements of the company. And what that means is our vision of the chart of the future was that every department within a company would have AI virtual assistants to help that particular department be more efficient, increase their output. So making AI hireable was so that you would look at this as a labor cost and not necessarily just a technology line item. And that, you know, take our first client, the New York Mets, you know, the idea was that you would have multiple AI agents specializing in each topic, that someone would have a possible question about. You'd have a parking agent, a ticketing agent, a food and beverage agent, a customer service agent agent, a marketing agent that would actually make sure that the rest of this was all cohesive and would play well together. And all we had to do was be really good at understanding the intent of the question and which agent to deploy. If we were on like a presentation, I would show you a very cool chart with robot looking figures within the. But that was the idea was that we would make AI hireable.

Mark Lapidus [11:18]: Let's see if we can make this a little more practical for DMO's for destinations. Thinking about integrating conversational AI, what factors.

Dan Flores [11:25]: Should they consider their content? For sure. Looking at, again, what the pain point they're trying to solve by having a conversational AI platform on the website. DMO websites are very big. You're talking, some of them could be in the 1213 14 1500 URL's associated with and then add another 25 3500 blogs. You need to know what content is relevant to what people are asking. So when you work with a company like ourselves of having a good idea of what content is up to date, knowing what visitors are asking is one of those things where we actually see that it goes down kind of the opposite route. They think that they know, and I'm guilty of this too, of being a tourism person going, yeah, this is really important. Now that I have the data and looking at it, people just simply don't ask for it. So knowing what their content is up to date and how they would build what their wish list is of what they would build with that content is important.

Mark Lapidus [12:27]: How do you integrate conversational AI with other platforms? You do that through an API or how do you mostly do it?

Dan Flores [12:34]: Yeah, API, open endpoints. We've got lots of partnerships with companies that work in the tourism space, the sports and entertainment space on the DMO side, a partnership with simple view where we have an integration into the CRM system. So if you're asking if you're a destination that uses their CRM for listings or events, and you ask a question about that, we're actually able to pull the content from the feed. And it's not necessarily pulling from the data that's on like a scraping of a website. What that does is for the DMO, it really lowers the content lift that they have to actually help out with.

Mark Lapidus [13:10]: AI always sparks conversations around privacy and data security. How do you approach those concerns when working with your tourism clients?

Dan Flores [13:18]: Yeah, it's a great question. Data privacy and security are one of the backbones of our platform. Working with professional sports teams and leagues, it's extremely important we meet every compliance that there is. So what I tell destinations is, yeah, of course we have all these things put in place. We do this for this particular team in your city or this particular professional sports leagues most of the time, that's the credibility that really helps our tourism clients make the decision to go with satisfy labs. If they can do it for the NFL, they can do it for us.

Mark Lapidus [13:52]: I think most smart marketers that work in tourism now understand that first party data is going to be essential moving forward. Do you deal with first party data collection?

Dan Flores [14:02]: We actually deal with zero party data collection because everything that comes into the chat itself is being given to you willingly from, without coasting it out, giving it willingly from the users. So that zero party data, it's telling you everything. It's telling you what they want, it's telling you what they need. It's telling you all of the information that we normally send out surveys and then we question the validity of that survey itself. I'll give a perfect example. And this is just one of the things that we have. I can look at lots of data from destinations and I had a DMO come to me the other day about putting together an itinerary builder for them and I said, oh, you know, great, let's look at your data and then we'll look at the organizational of destinations altogether. What we found is if you have a tool that's great, it's something that people can play around with, but people aren't asking for you to build itineraries for them. When it comes to a visitor just going to a website, it was at less than half of a half of a percent out of the 240,000 messages that we pulled in.

Mark Lapidus [15:01]: It sounds right. We have a trip planner on our own website. And I can tell you, the people that use it spend a lot of time on the website. I mean, they'll spend 14 minutes planning trips, but it is a small percentage of the overall traffic.

Dan Flores [15:12]: Yeah, and that's the thing. So if you have something already from a chat, we don't need to do it in the chat. If we see that there's an intent that we can push them to that. If you want to drive engagement to that trip planner, then what we'll do is we'll set up conversations so that as people ask about, let's say, a restaurant recommendation, we will answer that restaurant recommendation and then give them a suggestion to go play with the trip planner. That's way more effective than building an AI generated within chat itinerary builder because it simply just doesn't get used. I think that's the biggest difference of looking at the data and letting that tell us what to build out or how to build those conversations.

Mark Lapidus [15:54]: So DMO's that are interested in learning more just reach out to you through your website or LinkedIn or how do you prefer?

Dan Flores [16:00]: Yeah, any of the above. If you go to the website, you can book a demo with us right there. I'm very responsive.

Mark Lapidus [16:06]: We better let people know that satisfy spelled with an I at the end though, right?

Dan Flores [16:10]: That is very true. Yeah. And we appreciate that. And then, of course, if you want to reach out to me, I'm very responsive on LinkedIn and from an industry standpoint, I'm at quite a few events or our team is as well.

Mark Lapidus [16:21]: That's why you look familiar. The minute I saw you, I thought I knew you already, but I probably just seen you walk by Esto or Di.

Dan Flores [16:27]: I said I walked by you probably six or seven times at Esto.

Mark Lapidus [16:31]: I'm paying attention. That's funny. Well, Dan, it's been such a pleasure speaking with you. I really appreciate you taking the time and best of luck with the business. And I'd love to check in with you in the future to see how you're doing and how the business is changing.

Dan Flores [16:44]: No, Mark, thanks for, thanks for having me. It's been a great time today and. Yeah, absolutely, check in. We've got a couple things that we're getting ready to release. One of them is our new conversational ticketing feature, which actually takes the role of a ticketing agent from a conversational standpoint.

Mark Lapidus [17:01]: So the bot is going to say, you really, really, really want these tickets. They're great seats.

Dan Flores [17:07]: It's it's going to sell tickets very well. When you look at like on the tourism side from an attraction, things to do or even looking at pushing like package travel, we're going to be able to use this concept to really conversationalize that experience.

Mark Lapidus [17:21]: Sounds very cool. Can't wait to see it. One thing I should mention to our listeners before we go is we actually have a job posting right now that has to do with AI. And I don't know if it's still going to be by the time people are listening to this because it could be by the time this thing actually gets dropped that we are in the interview process. But I do want to let people know that brand USA is all in when it comes to AI. It's actually job opening for a senior vice president, which is titled innovation and chief artificial intelligence officer. So it's on thebrandusa.com if you want to check it out. And if you missed it, I'm sorry, check our corporate website more often and maybe you won't miss the next job openings.

Dan Flores [18:01]: Is it, is it weird if I throw my hat in?

Mark Lapidus [18:03]: No, not at all. Everyone is welcome. I'm sure you make a great candidate, Dan.

Dan Flores [18:09]: Thanks, Mark.

Mark Lapidus [18:10]: You're welcome. And that's it for Brand USA talks travel. I'm Mark Lapidus. Thanks for listening.

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