Optimising *your* taxi passenger APP:

YOUR ENTIRE FLEET IN YOUR CUSTOMER'S POCKET

BY SAFA ALKATEB

DRIVING INNOVATION
E-BOOK SERIES

How to ensure your passenger app is delivering customer delight, an unparalleled on-demand service and operational improvements across your business & how you can optimise your passenger app to increase bookings, usage frequency, greater automation and driver retention.

About the Author

Safa Alkateb was appointed Managing Director of Autocab in 2012 and brings over 22 years' experience in the communications industry. Prior to Autocab, Safa was the Founder and President of Parallogic Corporation, a multi-core software development company which was acquired by Cavium Networks. As General Manager Safa grew Cavium's software and services revenue by 400% in less than three years. He's passionate about the continued development and successful deployment of apps.

Do you feel let down by your app?

Was your passenger app supposed to increase your passenger numbers?

Is it lacking some of the functionality you think it needs?

Do passengers find it difficult to use?

Are the number of app bookings you receive a lot lower than you expected?

So, you've deployed a passenger app, but it hasn't really lived up to your expectations...

Many private hire taxi business owners launch their passenger app hoping that it will increase the number of bookings they receive and help automate more of their booking & dispatch process.

Instead, many don't see the additional business they had hoped for and instead find it causes customer complaints, driver dissatisfaction and administrative problems they didn't have before … how is this possible and what can you do to prevent this happening to your business?

Not all apps are created equal… At Autocab **we've deployed over four hundred passenger apps** for our customers which have collectively been **used to book millions of passenger journeys**. We've worked hard to understand what works for passengers, for drivers and for business owners and have created this e-book to help you get the most out of your app if you have one, or to help you ask the right questions from your supplier if you are considering deploying your own app.

This e-book will explain what features your app should have, what it should do, how it should perform and **what you should do** to ensure you're optimising your app and your service.

There's so much more to launching an app than choosing the right technology – it requires a change in thinking of how you fulfil passenger bookings and a true focus on customer service from both your systems, and your drivers, to provide a great app service.
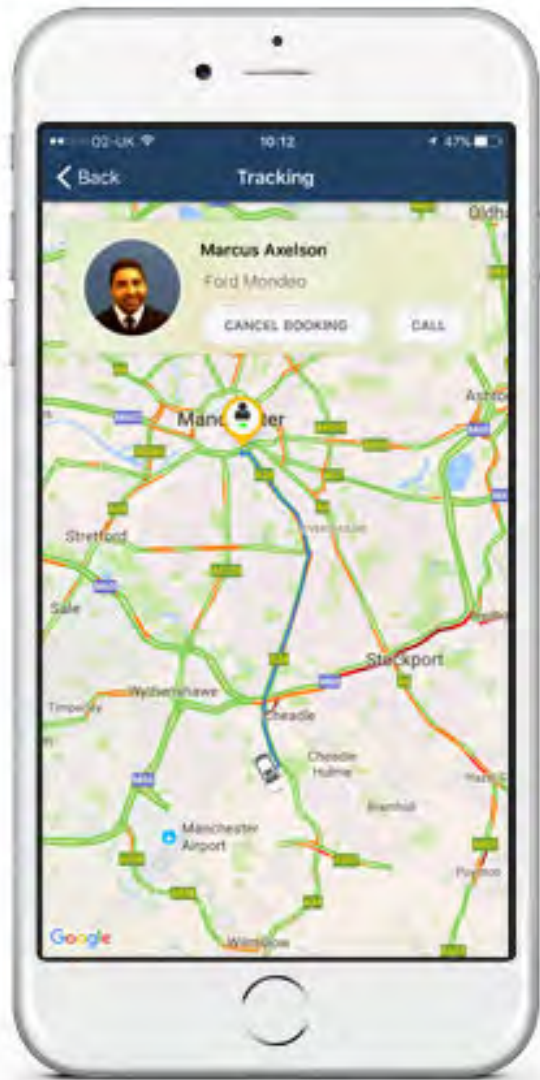
WHY SHOULD YOU
DEPLOY A PASSENGER APP?

Apps aren't just a nice-to-have, they're business critical...

Technology advances at a relentless rate – there is a whole generation of millennials who only know a digital, connected world. These app natives organise and manage their entire lives, relationships and transport requirements through their phones. They make up a very large part of your current and future customer base. It's also important to stress that technology usage isn't limited to those in their early twenties – smartphone penetration across older segments of the population also mean **more and more of your customers are connected and keen to book a car via app.**
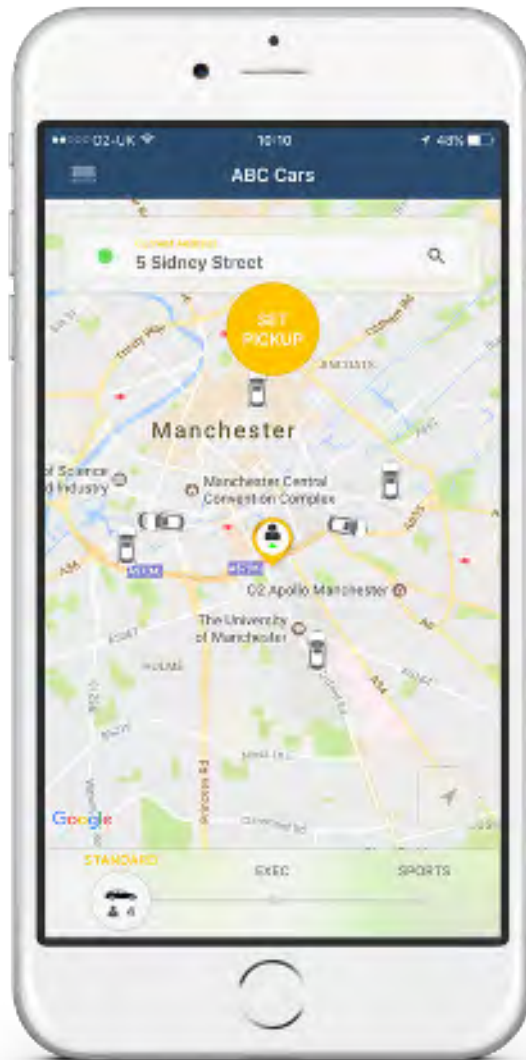
Customers love passenger apps because they're convenient!

By offering a passenger app you're putting your customer in control. It gives them full visibility over the entire booking & dispatch process and they don't need to talk to anyone to book a car or get the information they want. Customers can track the whole process, including the arrival of their car and can see the estimated- or fixed-price of their journey in advance.

In addition, customers can enter their payment details once, and it's done. Payment for every ride is taken care of – no need to remember to leave enough money in their purse when on a night out, and no need to ask the driver to stop so that they can visit the ATM.

A passenger app saves you money!

As you're no doubt aware the cost of processing a telephone booking is estimated to be 25p. If your operators are processing 20,000 bookings per week and you're able to achieve an average of 30% of your bookings through your app, then you'd be looking at £1500 of savings per week or £6000 per month!

A passenger app leads to improved service

Human interaction leads to errors, no matter how conscientious your operators and drivers are, mistakes can and do happen. Whether its cars going to the wrong pick up address, cars sent at the wrong time, operators being rude on the phone, or not answering the call quickly enough – all of this leads to a bad customer experience and a potential reason for the passenger to choose not to use you again. A passenger app reduces your risk of human error negatively affecting service.

Help level the playing field with the TNCs

Having your own passenger app, technologically, puts you on a level playing field with TNCs such as Uber, Hailo and Lyft – offering an app is great for customer acquisition and repeat bookings. Above all it's a great way to improve your service offering in the eyes of your customers who now expect their private hire taxi company to have an app.

HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE
A GREAT APP?
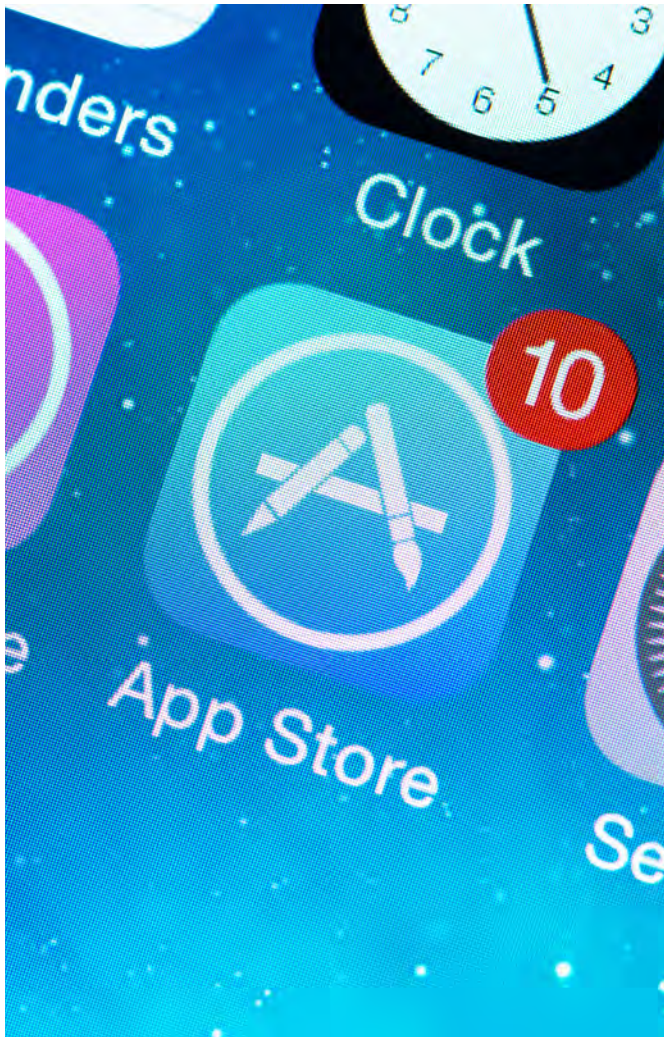
A passenger app must look modern, clean & attractive

It's a consumer product so it needs to be attractive; your app will be displayed next to, and therefore compared to, other consumer apps available on your user's phone, like Facebook, Snapchat and Amazon! Not only is your choice of logo for your app critically important, but so is the design of the app interface itself – how it looks and feels to the user. If anything about the app or the design feels amateurish, they will abandon your app and uninstall.

A passenger app must be optimised for one purpose

If the app requires more than two taps to book a car, or if it takes more than 5 seconds to assign a car, then customers will abandon the app and will call, (if you're lucky) or will use a competitor app such as Uber instead. No need for excessive bells and whistles – everything about your app must be help your customers do just one thing – book a car.
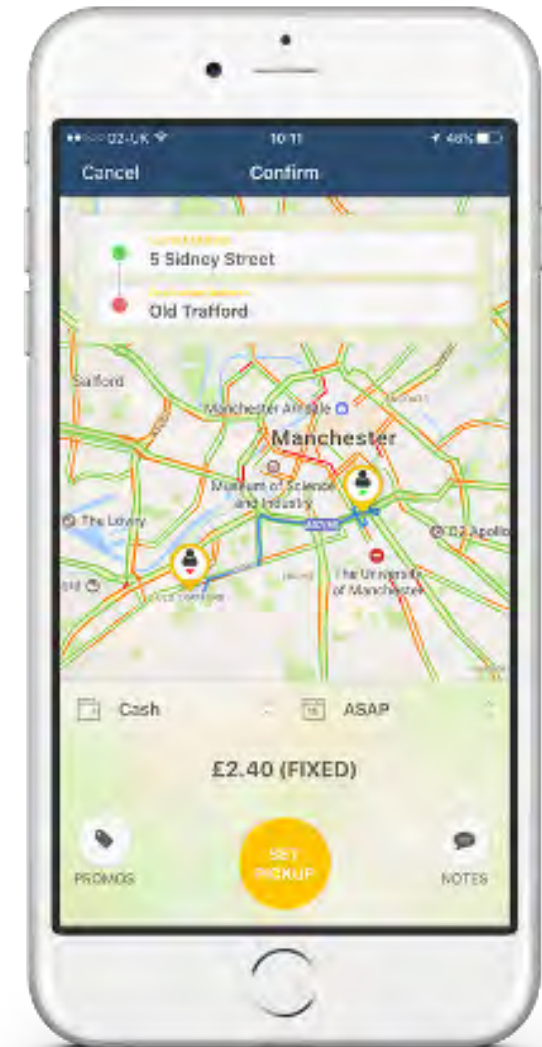
A passenger app needs to be responsive

When the user peforms an action on your app or when the app displays a new page – the page must load or refresh quickly, with no lag time whatsoever. Instant, responsive, seamless. Users expect your app to work and work well, each and every time they use it.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES OF
A GREAT APP

The design principle that must guide all of your decisions when it comes to your passenger app is – keep it simple and keep it uncluttered – it must be fit for purpose and one purpose only: easy for users to book the car they want, when they want.

Passengers who download your app want to get started straight away and don't have time to figure out how your app works – Remember that according to Google a staggering 25% of all installed apps are never used and a further 26% of installed apps are abandoned after the first use, with many being put off by their first experience. Keep it simple, don't re-invent the wheel. Only ask for the information that you absolutely must have in order to be able to process the passenger's booking. Too many apps ask for too much information before allowing the user to get started... there's a good chance users will abandon the set up or registration process if it's not simple and quick.

Every page or screen must offer just one choice or action – don't overwhelm passengers with too many questions, options or actions. One page to add an email address, one page to add payment information. Done. They're now ready to book a car.

It must be instantly obvious to new users and experienced taxi app users how your app works. No one likes surprises. If you think your app is looking cluttered, remove additional options, features and menus – keep it simple and ask yourself one simple question – does this page help passengers book a car?

FEATURES A GREAT APP
MUST HAVE

If you're considering launching a passenger app, or you have already deployed an app but it's not driving the number of bookings you were hoping for, here is **a list of features you must have if you want to offer users the very best customer experience:**

It must be map-based – this is the norm and the standard that app users expect and require.

It must highlight where the user is – not only do you need this information to be able to display the available cars and work out ETA and pricing, it immediately confirms to the user that the app is working and accurate.

It must show the available cars near the pick-up location – it's important that it's not representative, but the actual number of cars individually represented and shown in their actual location via GPS tracking.

It must show cars moving – again, not representative but a true reflection of their actual location. From the user's point of view, quite literally, is the car moving towards me and my location?

It must offer ASAP pick-up time or the ability to pre-book a car for the future – customers require and expect this choice of options and they help you automate more bookings.
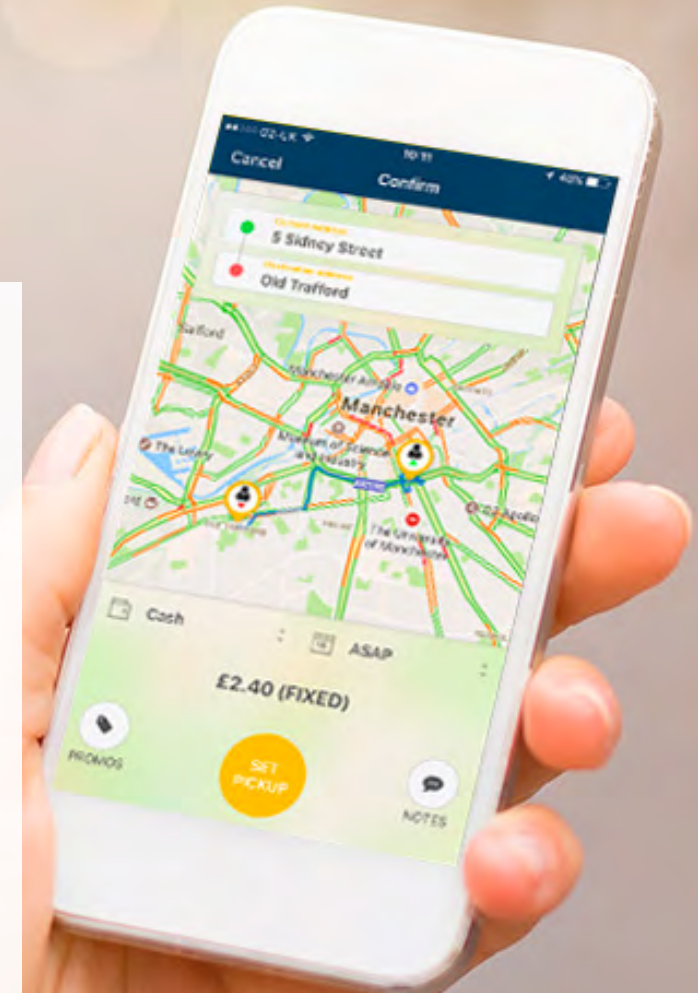
It must support all forms of payment - Whether customers want to pay by credit and debit card, cash, Account, PayPal, Apple Pay or Android Pay, your app must offer them all.

It must allow users to choose a pick-up location – Although a majority of users will require a car where they currently are, they must be able to choose an alternate pick-up or to correct the pick-up location displayed.

It must load and display recent pick-up locations – For ease-of-use great apps show the user's most recent pick-up locations to allow them to quickly place a repeat booking and in addition must be able to load and display recent pick-up locations the customer has booked using that phone BEFORE they downloaded the app!

It must be able to process promotion/ voucher codes – promotional codes are a great way to encourage app downloads and generate repeat usage.

It must allow users to define the destination and display a price for the journey – customers need to know the actual or be presented with an estimated cost of the trip in advance of the journey.

It must provide information to the customer about their driver – let your passengers know their driver's location and provide the passenger with the driver's name, photo, car type and registration details as soon as the car is assigned.

It must connect driver and passenger – passenger and driver, on occasion, require the ability to call or message each other, but both party's details must remain private and confidential.

It must provide a complete and accurate booking history – customers can quickly and easily access all of their previous bookings – from where, to where, when & how much they paid.

It must provide a receipt on demand – your customers can request a branded receipt through the app which is sent to their email address.

It must be configurable by you – no need to book additional development time from your app provider to configure or change aspects of your app – for example, to be able to change the graphics representing cars to mark popular festivals such as Halloween with pumpkins or ghosts, or to mark the Holiday Season with a snowman. To change the colour of your app screens to reflect your own company's colours and to configure the vehicle types that your firm offers such as executive, mini-bus and estate car.

It must link to your other digital properties – visible links to your website and to your social media profiles from your app.

It must allow passengers to change their account info - in-app account management so users can update or edit their account information such as their email address, payment details etc

HOW DO I DEPLOY &
OPERATE MY APP?

We've deployed over 400 white label apps for our customers' and have built up a lot of experience and expertise in app development and deployment. Although we provide the same market-leading app technology to each of our customers, how is it possible that the same app for one company can generate 3% of their total bookings and for another company 35%? This large variance is determined not by app technology but by how a firm treats app bookings.

A common mistake firms make when deploying a passenger app is to treat app bookings the same way they would a phone or even a web booking. It's critical to understand that the user experience of booking by app is completely different than booking by telephone, which means you must treat those bookings differently as a business.

CALL BOOKINGS EXPLAINED

In the case of a call booking the operator (or IVR software) answers the customer's call, takes the booking and quotes an arrival time – let's say 10 minutes. From this point on, the customer has no visibility over the process; they don't know where they are in the queue, how many drivers you have working at the moment and where their driver is right now...

Their entire experience is dependent and measured on one single metric – did the car arrive before, or after, the 10 minutes quoted by the operator?

APP BOOKINGS EXPLAINED

On opening the app, the user can immediately see all of the available cars in their vicinity. Even without an ETA being quoted, with just a basic knowledge of the area, they have an accurate picture of the volume and location of the nearest cars. They will assume that the car that is closest to them will be assigned to them. When they click 'book' they know that they have complete visibility over the entire process as their assigned car begins to travel towards the pick up location – passengers can and do watch the whole experience on their app.
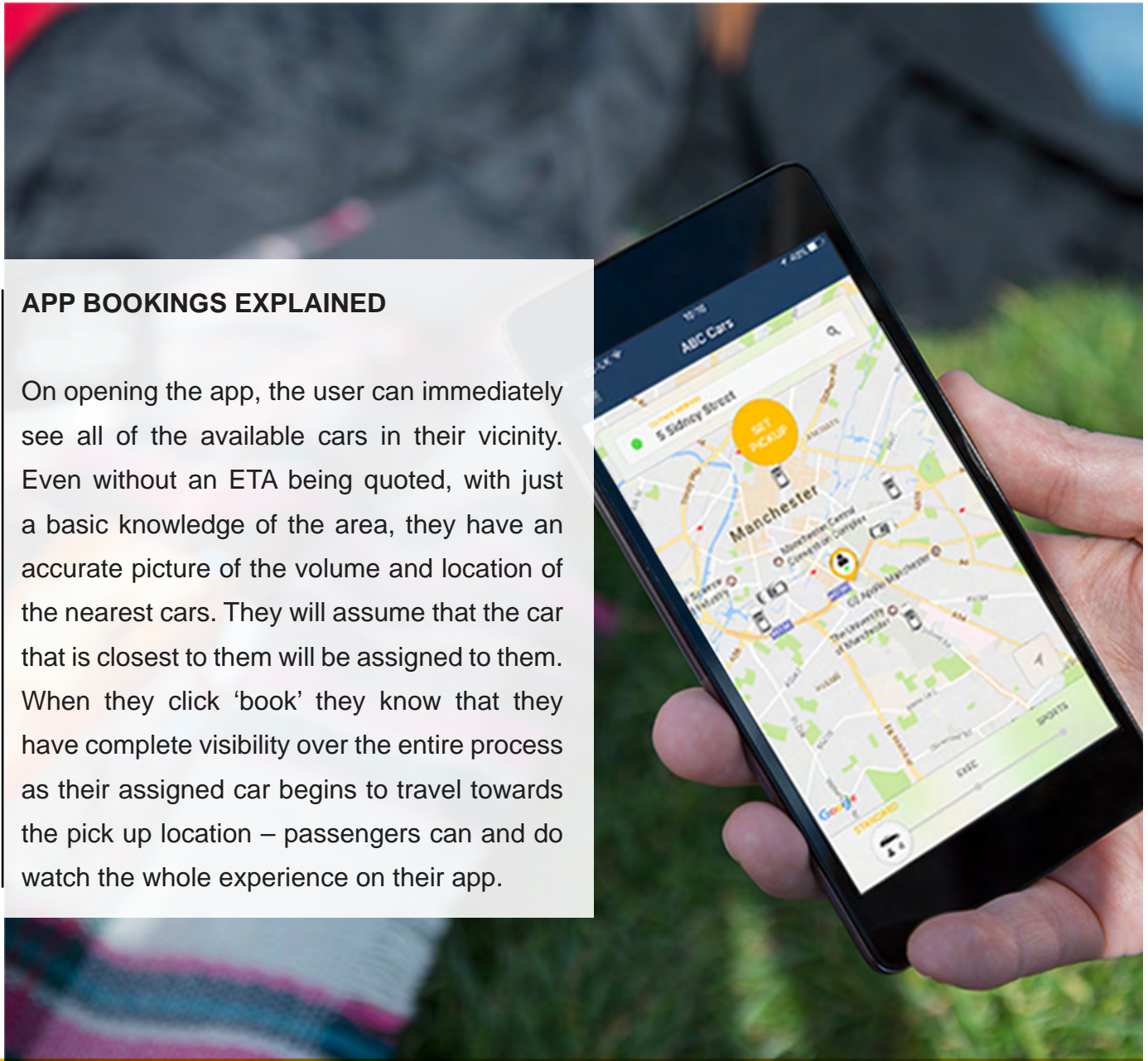
DELIVERING THE PERFECT APP BOOKING EXPERIENCE

(and why you should treat app bookings differently from telephone bookings)

When you quote an ETA via your passenger app, it's essential that your car meets the expectations your app has set. Remember that the passenger can watch the car approaching via the app, so any delay or deviation is visible.

You may have set up dispatch rules for phone or even web bookings such as 'give next job to the longest waiting car', but from the app passenger's point of view, if the booking is not given to the closest car, this gives a bad experience. It's therefore imperative to dispatch the closest car for an app booking.

Make sure drivers do not reject or recover app bookings – Why? Because the app will tell the passenger the name of the driver and the details of the car that has been assigned to them. If the driver recovers (accepts the job and then later rejects it) the app will send the new driver info to the customer along with revised ETA. This gives a terrible customer experience, may make passengers suspicious and is not the seamless, easy, trustworthy app experience customers want or expect.

When a passenger books by app, the process is not finished for them until the app confirms which driver is coming and how long it will take – the speed at which this information is provided to the passenger is critical. The time between requesting a booking and receiving an accurate dispatch time should be less than five seconds - don't leave the passenger hanging, or they're likely to cancel and then abandon your app.

NEVER TURN OFF
YOUR APP

On certain days, when you're inundated with calls, web bookings and app bookings, it can be a temptation to turn off your passenger app, with the thinking being that turning off the channel will help your operators and drivers manage demand better, but this gives customers the very worst experience possible because they still have the app on their phones and they will still be trying to book a cab – more so if they are unable to get through on the phone line. But they'll be left hanging, waiting for a car to be assigned which is simply not going to happen – this is a terrible customer experience and one likely to result in your app being abandoned or uninstalled.

Autocab technology can help you solve this problem, so that you never need turn off your app.

In broad terms there are two types of customer – reliable and unreliable customers. You will have built up a profile of all of your customers (a customer for the purpose of this discussion is defined as a unique phone number) and you can configure your app (and your phone systems if you are using Autocab Phantom,) to only accept bookings from reliable customers.

To help our customers manage busy periods, we have developed a traffic light tier system, which categorises your customers as green (tier 1), amber (tier 2) or red (tier 3) customers: **Green customers** are your reliable customers – always at the pick up location, ready for the driver and have always paid in full.

Amber customers are generally reliable but there may have been an incident in the past such as booking a car but not being there when the driver arrived.

Red customers are unreliable – they have a history of no-shows in the past and they're often late and they may even have been abusive, aggressive or soiled a vehicle in the past.

In this case, during busy periods you can prioritise your customers based on their previous record with your company. Red customers will simply see a 'sorry, there are no cars available right now' message – keeping your cars available for your green and amber customers. With this solution, no matter how busy your firm, if customers book by app they'll know in just four seconds if there's a car or not available. This preference system is all completely automated, recognises loyal customers and means you won't let your best customers down.

Turn off your app = you will lose customers
Trust in your app = it will work for you

"With your app correctly configured you can positively encourage your customers to book by app during busy periods and if there's a car available, they'll get it."

At Autocab we're obsessed with automation and helping our customers work smarter. If you'd like to learn more about Autocab and how we can help you launch your passenger app, we'd be delighted to hear from you:

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More customers, more bookings and more automation with Autocab's white label Passenger App.

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