

THE CHALLENGE

We knew that a card was likely not the right way in. After all, an American Express card is not something a twenty-something can easily qualify for.

Thus, the challenge was twofold:

- Find a true American Express experience that would demonstrate to a younger audience the power of the brand.
- Seed desire for a well-established brand that was already embraced by their parents as a badge of honor.

OUR TARGET

We started by getting crystal clear on who we're talking to. American Express has never been a brand for everyone. We've always connected with a subset of the population. Not just people with means, but people with vision. Extraordinary individuals. It's a mindset, not a demographic.

We needed to ensure that we're continuing to connect with this mindset—a subset of Gen Y.

But first we had to understand who they are.

Figuring Out the Future Extraordinary

For the first phase of insights gathering, we partnered with the Futures Company. Drawing on longitudinal data from their annual study of consumer attitudes, we identified a subsection of millennials who are most likely to be future American Express customers. We called them "Future Extraordinaries."

Future Extraordinaries are ambitious, principled and financially savvy. They comprise 27% of 18- to 31-year-olds.

For the second phase, we conducted an ethnographic study to explore Future Extraordinary traits in greater depth. We hung out in Harvard Square and The Haight. We spent hours talking to people in their dorm rooms and starter apartments about their rituals, enthusiasms and ambitions.

THE OPPORTUNITY & STRATEGY

What these natives of the Information Age are craving is to be uninformed. They crave surprise, serendipity, mystery.

How could we create an American Express branded experience that would speak to the desire to be kept in the dark? How could we show that the ultimate service is to give people what they don't even know they want?

The answer lay in our storied heritage as a travel brand. A twenty-something may not be approved for a card, but travel has a lower barrier to entry. You don't need a high credit score to get a passport.

The strategy: Draw on our deep expertise in travel to demonstrate the power of the American Express brand to deliver serendipity and mystery to a new generation.

BACKGROUND

American Express has always maintained a premium barrier to entry. From express delivery to travel to payments, we've offered products and services for people who are doing extraordinary things and living extraordinary lives.

In recent years, the brand had become a powerful symbol of success. The card had become a badge that told the world you'd made it.

American Express was looking for ways to connect with a younger audience. The average age of a new Cardmember is 42.

With an aging customer base, it was imperative to create a relationship with a rising generation of extraordinary individuals. We needed to show that we're a brand for people who are on their way, not just a badge for those who have already arrived.



SUMMARY

This is a story about reinvention. For 160 years, American Express has been an icon of success. A badge for extraordinary individuals, doing extraordinary things, living extraordinary lives. But these individuals—our customer base—are aging. Our assignment was to reinvent the brand's relevance for a new generation, turning it into a badge for a younger audience, an audience on the path to being extraordinary themselves. We needed to show that we're a brand for people who are on their way, not just a badge for those who have already arrived.

One thing this audience shared with the extraordinary people that came before them was their love of travel. But when it came to travel, they had a problem they didn't even realize yet. A problem that they themselves were perpetuating. In fact, the way we saw it, travel was broken for a whole generation and becoming more broken by the day. Fixing it would be the key to the reinvention the American Express brand needed.

This case study reveals the power of planning to identify a target gone unrecognized, a need gone unacknowledged and ultimately a new category that would reignite one of America's most historic brands.

The screenshot displays the American Express website's 'NextPediton' section. At the top, the navigation bar includes links for 'MY ACCOUNT', 'CARDS', 'TRAVEL', 'REWARDS', and 'BUSINESS'. A search bar with the text 'Need help?' and a 'LOG IN' button are also present. Below the navigation bar, a banner for 'NEXTPEdition™ from American Express Travel' features a large, dark image of a person in a car. The text on the banner reads: 'A CUSTOM-MADE MYSTERY TRIP BASED ON YOUR TRAVEL SIGN'. Below this, a list of steps is shown: 'YOU UNCOVER YOUR TRAVEL SIGN', 'WE BUILD YOU A MYSTERY TRIP', 'WE REVEAL YOUR ITINERARY DAY BY DAY', and 'YOU HAVE AN AMAZING ADVENTURE'. A button labeled 'WHAT KIND OF TRAVELER ARE YOU? FIND YOUR TRAVEL SIGN NOW' is at the bottom of the banner. To the right, a small image of a sailboat is labeled 'Autumn Ahh Farbarian™ San Francisco'. Below the banner, there are social media sharing options for Twitter (196), Facebook (419), and a 'Send' button. A section titled 'HOW IT WORKS' shows a sequence of three images: a car, a person in a car, and a person in a car. To the right, a section titled 'FIND YOUR SIGN' shows a person in a car. Further right, a section titled 'NOT READY FOR A NEXTPEdition?' shows a person in a car. At the bottom right, there is a 'ShareThis' button.

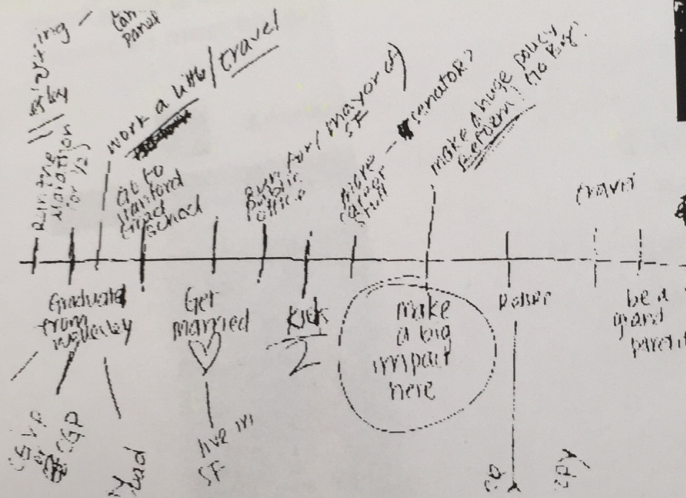
THE INSIGHTS

A Generational Syndrome: Preparation Overkill

Here's what we learned: These young people are challenge-seeking go-getters who have their lives planned out. They've grown up in a world where information is always at their fingertips and Googling is second nature. They're ultra-literate in all the tools that give people mastery over the unknown world. Street View. Yelp. Their own social networks that have already "been there, done that."

Like our existing customer base, they're passionate about travel. It's seen as an integral part of a successful life.

Maggie, 19



But there was a key difference. Something we hadn't expected, but made perfect sense once we thought about it: The Future Extraordinaries are so steeped in the digital world that they're in danger of losing the wonder and delight that travel provides. They prepare and plan and prepare some more.

It's preparation overkill. And as a result, too often they've seen it all before the trip has even started.

Seth, 20 – "Sometimes I just want to spin the globe and go where my finger lands."

INHERENTLY SOCIAL

From start to finish, the **NEXTPEDITION** experience was designed to be social. If we wanted our elusive target of Future Extraordinaries to discover **NEXTPEDITION** and share with others, we needed to be in social media channels where they were already. The Travel Profiler quiz was available on Facebook, in store, on street team iPads and on people's phones. The Travel Sign is a badge you claim and share with others. When you take a trip, you can broadcast the experience to your network. Where the travelers go and what they do becomes the content to market **NEXTPEDITION** to other travelers.

By leaning heavily on social, we're using our target audience to attract one another and spread the word organically.

facebook Search Home Profile Account

American Express Like

Wall Info NEXTPEDITION New Offers Small Biz Sat PASS Card >>

Create an Ad Facebook Pages

NEXTPEDITION
A CUSTOM-MADE MYSTERY TRIP BASED ON YOUR TRAVEL SIGN

Information
Founded 1850
About
Welcome to the official American Express fan page!
American Express is a global service company, providing customers with exceptional access to products, insights and experiences that enrich lives and build business success.

2 Friends Like This
Taylor Jason Ring

312,342 People Like This
Abby R. Vibhu Sahdev Annel Fianto

Meet NEXTPEDITION

**WHAT KIND OF TRAVELER ARE YOU?
FIND YOUR TRAVEL SIGN NOW.**

THEY'VE FOUND THEIR SIGN. WHAT'S YOURS?

Alisha Rhooode is a **POSHAHOLIC**

Lorie Meyers is a **TRENGINEER**

Zak Menker is a **HIPLOMAT**

John Clarke is a **DETOURIST**

Catherine Nelson is a **BLISSTORIAN**

See More

BETA TESTERS AS ASSETS & ADVOCATES

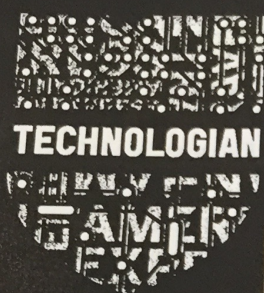
The marketing was baked into the NEXTPEDITION product. It was also baked into the testing phase.

Our beta testers became our trailblazers. We followed them on their trips with a video crew, interviewed them in situ and captured their experiences. Their feedback was crucial to help ready the product for launch. But it served another purpose, too: We used all that filmed content as the creative assets for our launch site and marketing. Real travelers on real NEXTPEDITIONs venturing into the unknown was more compelling to potential travelers than any single message or tagline.

NEXTPEDITION™

MYSTERY TRAVEL FROM AMERICAN EXPRESS

How one of America's most storied brands redefined itself for a rising generation by inventing a new category of travel.



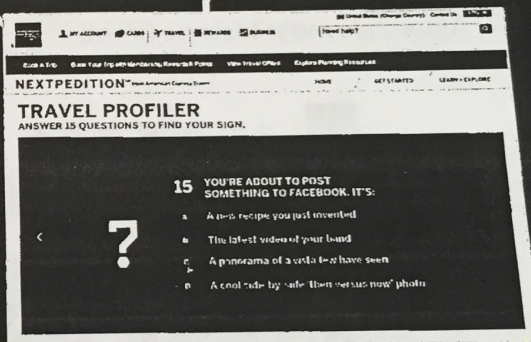
CYBER



CELEBUTANTE



BLISSSTORIAN



ZENTURIAN



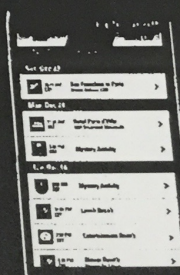
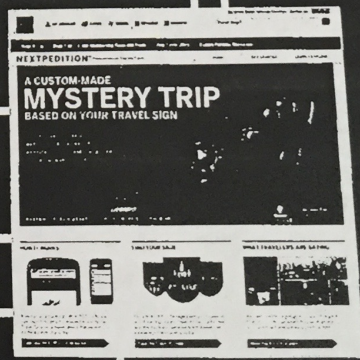
POSHAHOLIC



GLAMOLOGIST

HIPILOMAT

FARBARIAN



THE INNOVATION

What if we created a next generation travel product that tapped into our target's passions and used technology to create surprise—not spoil it?

Introducing **NEXTPEDITION**. It's a mystery trip brought to you by American Express. It's a unique experience custom-built around a traveler's interests and revealed day by day via a handheld Travel Console.

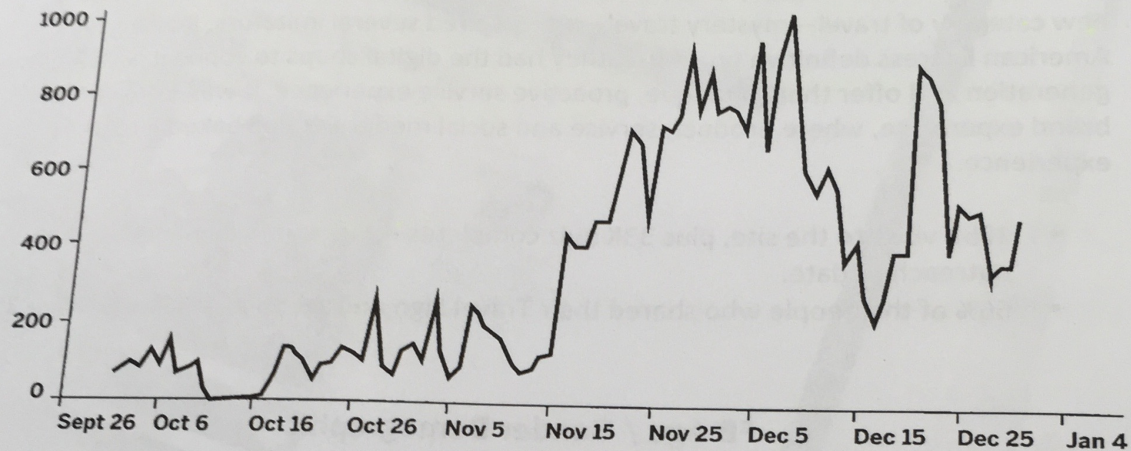
A New Category of Travel for a New Generation of Travelers

NEXTPEDITION was a new product launch that ended up launching a new category of travel. It was cited in the *Harvard Business Review* and *Fast Company* as a game-changing idea. Leading consumer trend firm Trendwatching.com called NEXTPEDITION a prime example of Status Stories—"a shift from brands telling a story, to brands helping consumers tell status-yielding stories to other consumers."



- In December 2011, Jimmy Kimmel featured NEXTPEDITION on his show. He took the Travel Profiler quiz, discovered that he's a Tasteblazer and exhorted his audience to visit Nextpedition.com. The site received a big boost in traffic due to the *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* coverage.

Visits Trended | Q4



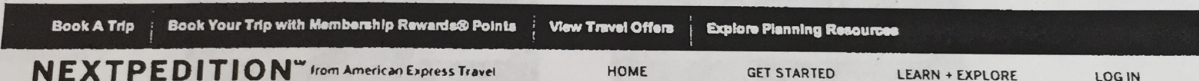
HOW IT WORKS

It starts with the Travel Sign—a kind of traveler's horoscope based on passions and interests. Aspiring travelers are invited to take an interactive personality quiz to discover whether they're a Poshaholic, a Zenturian or one of 18 other signs. Once someone finds their Travel Sign, they can share it to their newsfeed so friends and family can find their signs as well.

NEXTPEDITION covers nearly 20 destinations that connect to specific Travel Signs. San Francisco is for Tastebazers, Barcelona for Hiplomats, Montreal for Gastronomists, etc.

Each NEXTPEDITION features prearranged mystery activities that are as varied as the cities and Travel Signs themselves. Some NEXTPEDITIONers were sent to a pizza-making class in Rome, others found themselves at an after-hours club in Paris. Others ended up on a swamp tour just outside of New Orleans. No two trips are exactly alike.

Travelers on a NEXTPEDITION don't know where they're going or what they'll be doing. They must put their trust in American Express to lead them on their way.



TRAVEL PROFILER

ANSWER 15 QUESTIONS TO FIND YOUR SIGN.

[Send](#) Share the quiz with your friends!



WHAT TYPE OF TRAVELER ARE YOU?

Hey there. What's your Travel Sign? Are you a Cyber Survivor™? Or a Blissstorian™? Or something else? And on what NEXTPEDITION will your Travel Sign take you?

There's only one way to find out—by taking this Travel Profiler. So dive in, answer truthfully, and get ready to discover your Travel Sign.

[Start Travel Profiler](#)

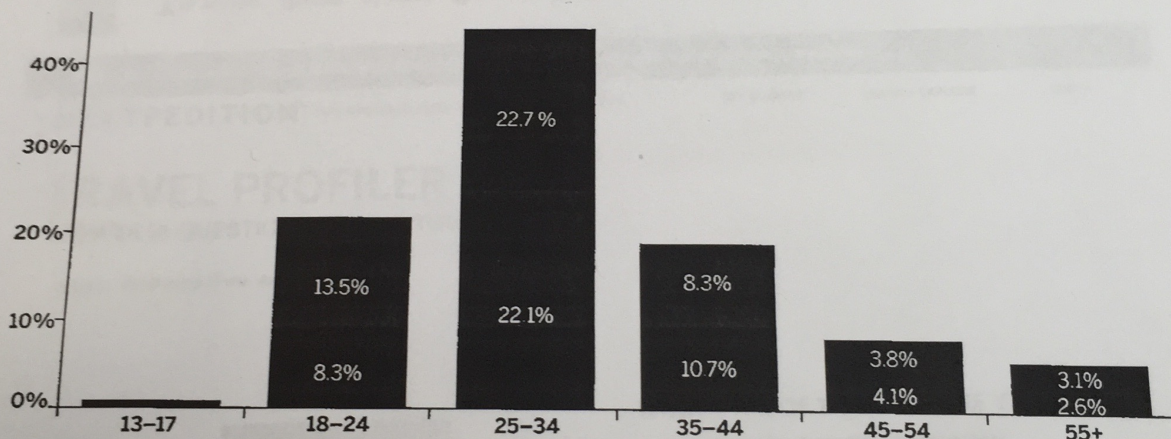
RESULTS

It was one of the best digital PR efforts to date for American Express and proved to be a powerful way to introduce American Express Travel to a younger audience and get people talking.

Not only was NEXTPEDITION a runaway marketing success, ricocheting through social media within days of launch, it was a standout product success. It created an entirely new category of travel—mystery travel—and inspired several imitators. It also gave American Express definitive proof that they had the digital chops to connect with a new generation and offer them a unique, proactive service experience. It was a new type of brand experience, where product, service and social media were all baked into one experience.

- 105K visits to the site, plus 33K quiz completes—with minimal marketing and outreach to date.
- 66% of the people who shared their Travel Sign on Facebook were under age 35.

FB Age / Gender Demographic



Creating a New Story about an Iconic Brand

- Estimated earned media impressions: 64,983,753 including *USA Today*, *New York Times*, *PSFK.com* and *Travel + Leisure*.
- Organic traffic spikes in Q1 and Q2 2012 due to blogger pickup stories.
- "American Express Travel's new NEXTPEDITION [is] turning even the most specialized agents nearly extinct." – *TheDailyMeal.com*
- "A cohesive idea with a sense of adventure for the 20- to 30-something set. Our latest find in a small string of innovative AMEX offerings" – *Ideaspotter.com*