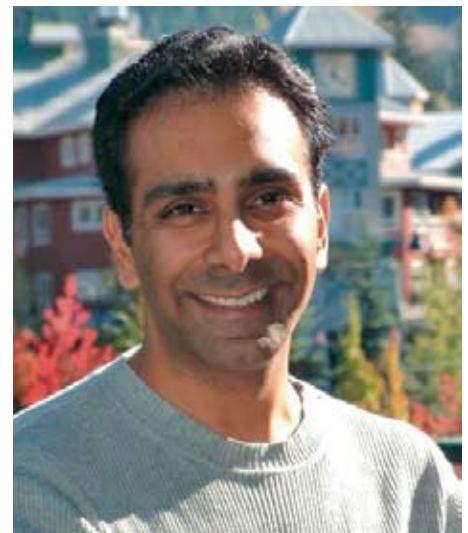


Akash Sablok



# Electronic Travel: Human Contact *Not* Required

**I wanted to surprise my wife for our first anniversary—to do something different and spontaneous and get some bargains along the way.**

I logged onto Westjet's site to search their vacation packages. West Edmonton Mall looked great! I added our travel dates, picked a decent hotel, and requested a price.

Confirmation arrived immediately and I printed the receipt. At that point, we had our flights and hotel—with 0 percent human communication.

For seat confirmation, I logged onto Westjet's site 24 hours before we were scheduled to depart.

Transportation at our destination was the next item. I visited Avis.ca where BC Notaries receive a 10 percent discount. Many associations have negotiated discounts with car rental companies. I copied and pasted the details into my Palm Pilot T/X.

Flight, hotel, and car rental were booked—all without talking to a real person. Then I logged onto a local taxi company Website, to book a cab to pick us up for the airport.

Because I had printed our boarding passes the night before, we didn't have to wait in the long check-

in lineup. We simply placed our bags on the belt and had our boarding passes scanned. We saved so much time, we were able to sit down for a nice breakfast. Ah, our first human intervention!

In the air, the flight attendants were very helpful and told us jokes to make the flight seem like a trip down the block.

**The Nuvi 660 has a SD card slot. I popped in a 1GB card and broadcast my preloaded MP3s onto an unused FM frequency on the car's stereo.**

Upon arrival, the Avis counter attendant looked at my driver's licence, credit card, and reservation number from my Palm (no paper—that saved 1/10,000th of a tree) and handed us the keys.

Before we left the airport parking lot, I plugged in our GPS unit—a Garmin Nuvi 660—and pulled up the hotel from the destination list I had preprogrammed in Vancouver. With the comfort of GPS guiding us and telling us exactly how much time it would take to get there, driving in Edmonton

was like travelling a well-known route in Vancouver.

The Nuvi 660 has a SD card slot. I popped in a 1 GB card and broadcast my preloaded MP3s onto an unused FM frequency on the car's stereo. Not only did we have our favourite tunes, the GPS unit automatically dimmed the sound when it needed to give us directions. It has Bluetooth connectivity built in, allowing me to use the device as a speakerphone for my Bluetooth-equipped cell phone.



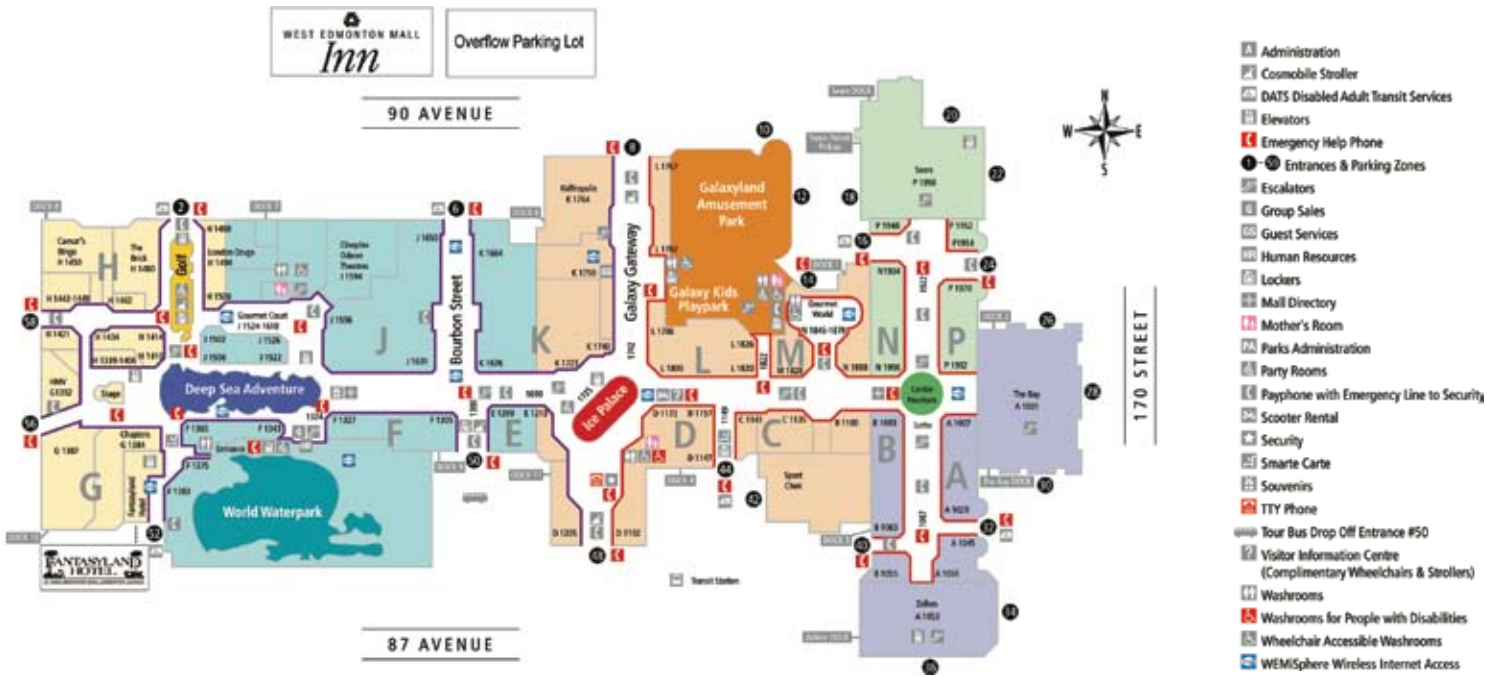
On route to the hotel, we saw some interesting places we might want to visit later. Instead of putting pen to paper, we simply hit a button on the GPS unit and bookmarked the locations.

At the hotel, I handed the clerk my driver's licence, credit card, and digital reservation. The hotel check-in time was 3 PM, but we arrived 5 hours

# West Edmonton Mall

## Level One

Store numbers begin with No.1000



early. We were able to get into our room early because we had made the reservation online and the site stated we could check in upon arrival. Sometimes, a technical glitch can work in your favour.

West Edmonton Mall was the next stop on our GPS unit.

Trying to find your way around “West Ed” is like working through a maze; you’re the mouse, find the cheese. We were, however, well prepared. I had downloaded the entire map of the Mall onto my Palm T/X from the West Ed Website. The map makes finding a store a snap. You can search by name or category and the map will flash its location.



Then we were ready for some heavy-duty shopping!

We enjoyed dinner that evening at a restaurant and visited a new resort recommended by our friend Jennifer who works at Intuit

Canada’s head office in Edmonton. Intuit produces the popular *Quickbooks* accounting software.

When it was time to check out, we reviewed our hotel bill on the room’s TV and paid by pushing buttons on the remote. We left the keys in the room and headed to our car.

**Trying to find your way around “West Ed” is like working through a maze; you’re the mouse, find the cheese.**

A few last hours of shopping netted us some really good bargains—and we saved the PST! Thinking ahead, I had put a medium-size suitcase into a larger one and we filled up both.

The GPS unit took the fastest route back to the airport’s rental parking lot. The Avis attendant waved his portable scanner over the UPC bar

code on the car’s window, took a quick look around the car, checked the fuel level, and printed us a final receipt—\$0 owing.

While he was definitely human, I think the only words I spoke to him were “hello,” thanks,” and “goodbye.”

Technology has definitely made travel much easier and quicker!

Website resources:  
[www.westjet.ca](http://www.westjet.ca)  
[www.avis.ca](http://www.avis.ca)  
[www.yellowcabonline.ca](http://www.yellowcabonline.ca)  
[www.garmin.com](http://www.garmin.com)  
[www.westedmall.com](http://www.westedmall.com)  
[www.palm.com/ca](http://www.palm.com/ca) ▲

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