

Travel agents must value their services

By [Rian Bormman](#)

13 Jul 2015

It's no secret that the internet has changed life as we know it. Sometimes for the good, sometimes for the not so good.

As a travel agent, you've felt the change in tides and are aware of the myriad booking options available for corporate and leisure travellers to DIY. But it's also where the opportunity lies: building one-on-one relationships with clients by providing personal expertise, passion and advice is invaluable, and is central to a successful travel business in the digital age.



Click-and-buy may be attractive to CT-JNB jetsetters for instance, but that same traveller may dislike wasting their time shopping around for the best deal when taking their family to Zanzibar on holiday. Time is money, and you can help your clients save on excess surfing by doing the leg-work for them. Or what about personal recommendations?

We live in an era of 'friend' reviews where your Facebook feed is as influential as a newspaper ad, offering inside insight to destinations and what to see there goes a long way and helps build trust in your experience and expertise. As does specialisation. Focusing on one area of travel such as sports tours allows you to target and capitalise on a niche, but financially-rewarding, market. On building up a name as an expert in e.g. bespoke rugby holidays, you're likely to enjoy referrals and higher conversions and sales.

Buy on emotion

Human service also cannot be underestimated. A real person to speak to, who can help if you get stuck in transit, is increasing in value as automated technology that provides a one-size-fits-all solution is more and more the default. And then there is your passion. While price matters, people also buy on emotion. Being able to sell a trip of a lifetime, or impart your love for an off-the-beaten track gem is essential for a travel business. Clients are people too and will connect with you - it shows when you love what you do and can share it with them.

"Planning a trip today can be confusing and time consuming. This can leave clients feeling overwhelmed by the volume of information available. A good travel agent is essentially a consultant and advisor - your advice, experience and connections are there to enrich the traveller's experience and turn an itinerary into an unforgettable happy memory," says agent Liezel Gouw of Voulez Travel.

Competition is fierce and charging fairly, while not selling yourself short, is a challenge many consultants experience - beyond those in travel. We suggest keeping domestic trips' service fees under R100 and international ones at around R399. Another way to charge is to mark-up flights by adding 10% to the base price. For instance, on a ticket from JNB to SYD that costs R11,199, you can charge 10% on R6,140 - the other R5,059 is its taxes.

Avoid over-charging

By doing so, you avoid over-charging a client should the taxes increase by the time of booking. In the case of multi-destination bookings - say JHB-SYD; HKG-JNB - a fixed fee of R399 doesn't justify your effort so we recommend marking-up the base fares. An easy breakdown of fares and taxes is available on the FlightSiteAgent platform.

Or you can earn an income through combo-trips such as flights to Mauritius and seven nights' accommodation. Here, you can charge commission as land arrangements can be leveraged. 10% is the standard fee so if you consider a booking of R100,000, this is R10,000 in commission. Using platforms that offer access to bulk buying benefits are also helpful.

In our case, as we're associated with Club Travel, you can enjoy pre-negotiated preferential rates with hotels worldwide, and the commission is built in. Another advantage is that the rates are often below those of the hotel if going direct.

But besides the value you bring, and the financial value therein, you must value your service wholeheartedly too. Educate yourself so your advice is top-notch and up-to-speed, access tools that provide travel products at negotiated rates that you can mark-up, and trust yourself as a source of invaluable information and service.

While a lot of things can be done online these days, the convenience factor doesn't always trump the quality and experience of a real flesh-and-blood consultant who offers real-life insight, guidance and help.

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