

Travel Agency Professionals Roundtable Discussion
Wednesday, 24 April, 2019
New York Hilton Midtown Hotel, New York City

- **Welcome and Introductions**
 - **Moderator:**
 - Dan Howell – Owner, Dan Howell Travel

- **Objective:**
 - In an industry that is often competitive and territorial, come together with other Travel Agency Professionals to discuss your most prominent challenges, biggest wins and best practices for a meaningful session of “coopetition”.

- **Discussion:**
 - **Introduction Overview:**
 - Dan opened the session saying that this is a symposium, not a seminar, it is a round table discussion that will involve participation.
 - There are important issues out there like the laws that are being proposed in Ohio with regards the taxation on travel.
 - Dan said that the travel agent is on the rebound. According to the latest stats that:
 - Millennials make up 33% of the people that use travel agents, Gen X at 17%, Baby Boomers 18%
 - Virtuoso says that Millennials are the biggest growth market at 43%, Gen X 20-24% and the Luxury Baby Boomers is everyone’s bread and butter.
 - **How do you get customers?**
 - For some referrals are the best form of marketing and starts with your own network. Get yourself out there. Join organizations that are hobby or interest based.
 - Another option is sending out newsletters to your database. Do a monthly newsletter and as soon as you send it out, you can often get calls from clients. Also join a BNI (Business Network International) network and get into a new network of influence.
 - BNI is a business network which has chapters all over the world in different cities. You don’t just meet these new members but also their whole network
 - Others spoke about the chapters that they are members of and how useful it is.
 - Wealthengine.com is a good lead generator of the wealthiest people in your city. You can buy the list from them and start marketing to them.
 - Hootsuite that is very useful to feed into all the various social network platforms.
 - Find out what specials your suppliers have, and he then send that out to your database. The offers should have a limited time period. *“Book before.....”*
 - Facebook for Business is a cost-effective way of marketing and you can schedule your post. Post an article a day and link your Facebook and twitter. You are getting engagement and validation as a travel professional.
 - Posts should be more about content and less about selling. You don’t want to be selling on social media
 - Websites must be mobile friendly
 - Have a CRM program that is mobile-friendly
 - Send out texts as well, but they are more information based
 - Mailchimp can be used for newsletters, the free version
 - Do a WordPress blog as well as website
 - Tour operators and Travel Agencies:

- It is in Tour Operators interests to look after the travel agents because they can become a continuous source of business whereas a direct consumer may only come to them once.
- **How do we get LGBTQ+ travelers in the doors?**
 - Public speaking at Events is a way to increase visibility for your brand
 - Be on boards, put your cards everywhere
 - Have cards wherever you are; Bars, Gay Prides, etc.
 - Video blogs with gay content, make content for people to watch
 - Instagram
 - Updated content very important, fresh, new, clients want to know that you are up to date
 - TripAdvisor, good reviews are important as a small business
 - Yelp is also good for referrals
 - Do lots of events to build up credibility. Some have now started charging for their events because they have become so popular. Helps establish them as a personal service and then these events are promoted on all the gay social media channels.
 - Challenge is that these events are regionally based and struggles to get wider reach
 - Video conferencing Q&A
 - Offer discount for clients for another booking within 6 months, repeat. Also, ask your clients to host a games night inviting their friends where you can meet new potential clients
 - Join a gay BNI and have a dinner once a month, socials every 2 weeks
 - Be a Sports sponsor of T shirts which is great advertising and the Pageant World is also a good opportunity
 - If a “brick & mortar” shop, you have an opportunity to promote supplier specials there. They charge for this opportunity, but it also offers fresh content.
 - Partner with restaurants and bookstores
 - If moved from another industry don’t forget to use your past profession as a network. For example, if you were a nurse use that fact to target other nurses.
 - Partner with suppliers that you use a lot. Such as Celebrity Cruises as they have LGBT marketing material
 - “VACAYA” has a great marketing campaign. They will send you a whole kit for your pride advertising.
 - ASTA has a consumer facing website that has 80 000 consumers and it can identify LGBTQ
 - Ask for referrals in the debrief after a client’s trip
- **Now that we have them in the door, how do we keep them?**
 - Use “Constant Contact” as a survey system. Survey after every cruise (trip) & send thank you notes
 - Guides have very valuable information about the clients, and they keep this on their vast databases about their clients. Guides have spent 2 weeks with the clients often.
 - “Duty of care” - agents have a responsibility for duty of care especially for the LGBT traveler
 - An example is, gay clients that love to travel to the Middle East, you may not get it, but you give them what they want.
 - Agents should send their clients where they can feel safe and welcome
 - There is no difference in how you market to LGBT but just channel your advertising to gay channels
 - As a travel agent you should know what destinations are safe and know what your client expects
 - Virtuoso has a wander list tool which is amazing because clients can choose where they want to go next and this helps with client retention.
 - Qualify your clients. What does the client need? Special requirements? Food allergies?
 - Know your resorts.
 - Hotel should be sensitive to their guests traveling.

- Sensitivity training for hotels is important. Hotels can not make assumptions on any travelers, gay or straight
- When traveling to Dubai or Abu Dhabi one must be sensitive and respect the culture of the country where you are visiting. The whole world is not West Hollywood
- Same when traveling to Egypt. Don't go onto apps because often they are traps by police. Put the rainbow away
- ***How do you feel about boycotting destinations because you don't like the policy of that country?***
 - You are doing your clients a disservice if you put your own opinions above what they want to do
 - Let them know of the possible dangers. Give facts, not your opinion
 - A travel advisor should give the full story not just the good parts
 - It is the agent's responsibility to find out on how to best travel in less LGBT friendly destinations to best advise your clients. Can't just offer the easy sells. Most value offered by a travel agent is for the difficult destinations.
- ***All agents should have a niche. Can't be good at everything. What is your unique value proposition? How do we make money?***
 - Must charge fees, as commissions are being cut by the industry
 - Make up customized trips where you can mark up and still be competitive
 - Your time is worth money. Charge a service fee and can credit it when they book a trip
 - Add as much value as possible. Try and add as much extra into the trip as possible
 - Join a consortium for better pricing.
 - Travel savers, Signature, Virtuoso, Travellermade
 - With a consortium you get overrides & better commissions
 - Do ads still work? Online or print advertising?
 - Depends on what you are using the advert for.
 - Targeted advertising has better ROI says Liz. Hard to measure advertising
 - Get as close as you can to your customer
- ***Wrap-up and closing***
 - **Thank you for participating!**